A

DISCOURSE

OF

CONSCIENCE.

THE

SECOND PART.

Concerning a

Doubting Conſcience.

LONDON,

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Sharp

THE CASE OF A Doubting Conſcience.

I Have in a former Diſcourſe ſpoken to the Caſe of thoſe Diſſenters who ſeparate from the Eſtabliſhed Church for this Reaſon, That they are *Perſwaded* that they cannot Lawfully joyn in our Communion. I now come to ſpeak to the Caſe of thoſe who ſeparate from us for a leſs Reaſon, *viz.* Becauſe they *Doubt* whether they may lawfully Communicate with us or no; and ſo long as they thus *Doubt*, they dare not come near us, becauſe they fear they ſhould ſin againſt God, if they ſhould do any Action with a *doubting Conſcience.*

To this indeed a ſhort Anſwer might be given from the former Diſcourſe, and that is this, That let the Obligation of a *Doubting Conſcience* be as great as we can reaſonably ſuppoſe it, yet if Communion with our Church as it is Eſtabliſhed be really a Duty, then a Mans *Doubts* concerning the Lawfulneſs of it, will not make it ceaſe to be ſo, or juſtifie his Separation from it. For if a Mans ſetled *Perſwaſion*, that an Action is unlawful, will not ordinarily acquit him from Sin if he omit that Action, ſuppoſing Gods Law hath commanded it (as I there ſhew'd); much leſs will a mans bare *Doubt* concerning the Lawfulneſs of an Action, juſtifie his Omiſſion of it in ſuch a Caſe.

But becauſe this Anſwer ſeems rather to cut the Knot, than to unty it; it is my meaning in the following Diſcourſe, particularly to

examine and diſcuſs this Plea of a *Doubting Conſcience*, and to ſhew what little force there is in it to keep any man from Conformity, that would otherwiſe Conform. Hoping that ſome Reader whoſe Caſe this is, may, by what he here finds offer'd toward his ſatisfaction, either be prevail'd with to lay aſide his Doubts in the matter of our Communion, or at leaſt be convinced, that it is more reaſonable and ſafe to communicate with us doubting, as he doth, than to continue in ſeparation from us.

In handling this Caſe of a *Doubting Conſcience*, I ſhall obſerve the ſame Method I did in the former Diſcourſe, becauſe indeed I cannot think of a better, That is, I ſhall endeavour to give an account of theſe four things:

I. Of the *Nature* of a *Doubting Conſcience*, and how it is diſtinguiſhed from the other Kinds of *Conſcience*.
II. Of the *Rule* of a *Doubting Conſcience*, or what Meaſures a man is to proceed by for the determining himſelf in a doubtful Caſe.
III. Of the *Power* that *Human Laws*, Eccleſiaſtical or Civil, have to *Over-rule* a mans *Doubts* in any matter.
IV. Of the *Authority* of a *Doubting Conſcience*, *i. e.* Whether at all, or how far a man is *Obliged* by it?

Theſe four Heads do, I think, take in all the Difficulties that are in the Caſe of a Doubting Conſcience.

I. I begin with the firſt Head, The *Nature* of a *Doubting Conſcience*. In ſpeaking to which, I ſhall Treat of theſe three things. 1. Of *Doubting* in general. 2. Of ſuch *Doubts* as do affect or concern a Mans *Conſcience*. 3. Of the Difference between the *Doubting Conſcience*, and the *Scrupulous*.

1. As to the firſt of theſe, which is concerning the Nature of *Doubting* in general, we may take Notice, That a man is properly ſaid to *doubt*, when he cannot give his Aſſent to either part of a Contradiction, that is, cannot make a Judgment whether the thing he is conſidering, be ſo, or be not ſo; but through the equal, or at leaſt fair probability that is on both ſides of the Queſtion, continues irreſolute and undetermined; now, perhaps, he thinks this Side the more probable, and by and by the other, but he is uncertain as to both, and cannot fix upon either.

So that a *Doubting* Mind is not more uſually than properly, reſembled

ſembled to a *Ballance*, which by Reaſon of the equal Weight which is put into both Scales, is not caſt on either ſide, but hangs in the ſame Poſture, or waves up and down, without either Scale coming to the bottom.

Nevertheleſs, in a doubtful Caſe, a man may lean more to one ſide of the Queſtion than the other, and yet continue doubtful ſtill. Juſt as there may be ſo much more Weight put into one Scale than the other, as will be ſufficient to incline the Ballance more to that ſide; while yet that Weight is not ſo conſiderable as to be able perfectly to turn it, ſo as to carry down the Scale to the uſual mark of Down-Weight, and there to ſettle it.

There is indeed this difference between theſe two things, that a Ballance through the exact equality of the Weights put into each Scale, may be ſo poiſed, as to hang perfectly in *æquilibrio*, without inclination either way, and continue ſo to do: but it will be difficult, if not impoſſible, to put a Caſe or a Queſtion, where a mans Mind, after all things conſidered, is ſo perfectly indifferent to both ſides of it, as not to be more inclined to chuſe one, than the other.

When once there appears ſo much more Evidence on one ſide of the doubtful Caſe, that the Mind is enabled to determine it ſelf, and to give a ſettled aſſent on that ſide, then the man ceaſeth to doubt any longer; for that which was a *Doubt* before, is now turned into a *Perſwaſion*. And if it be a Caſe wherein Conſcience is concern'd, that which was before a *Doubting* Conſcience, is now chang'd into a *Reſolved Conſcience*. Here to reſume our former Compariſon, the Ballance no longer hangs in *æquilibrio*, or moves unſetledly this way or that way, but is plainly turned and fixed on one ſide.

It is true, in this Caſe a man doth not always determine himſelf with the ſame degree of Perſwaſion, or Satisfaction to his own Mind. Sometimes the Evidence is ſo ſtrong, as to command an entire Aſſent of his Underſtanding; an Aſſent ſo full, that it hath not the leaſt mixture of doubtfulneſs in it; and this we call an *Aſſurance*, or a *full Perſwaſion*. At other times, the Evidence may be of force enough to gain an Aſſent, but yet not ſo ſtrong an Aſſent as to exclude all Doubt of the contrary; and this kind of Aſſent we call an *Opinion*, or a *probable Perſwaſion*. And ſomething like this we may obſerve in the Ballance: The Scale that preponderates, is not always carried down with the

the ſame Force and Briskneſs; but according as the Weight that turns the Ballance is greater or leſs, ſo in proportion it may plainly be diſcern'd that the Scale deſcends either more ſtrongly and nimbly, or more weakly and ſlowly. But ſtill, in both theſe Caſes, the man hath formed a Judgment of the Point; the Ballance is turned, and wherever this happens, there is an end of the Doubt or *Æquilibrium*, and conſequently, if it be in a Caſe that concerns a mans Conſcience, it ceaſes to be any longer a Doubting Conſcience, and becomes reſolved and determined, though perhaps not fully ſatisfied and free from all kind of doubt and ſcruple about that thing.

2. And thus much of *Doubting* in general. I now come to conſider it with Reſpect to *Conſcience*, *i. e.* to enquire how far, or in what Caſes a mans Conſcience is affected with his Doubts? Which is our ſecond Point under this Head.

There are a thouſand Caſes in which a man may be doubtful, as to which his Conſcience ſhall be no way concerned. A mans Doubts may indeed be as various as are the Objects he hath to conſider, and to make a judgment of; and therefore unleſs we will ſay, that every thing that a man thinks of, or ſaith, or doth, affects his Conſcience, we muſt not ſay that every Doubt doth.

As a mans Conſcience is not touched, nor affected with any thing but his own Actions; ſo neither do a mans Doubts affect or touch his Conſcience any further than they concern his Actions. So that Doubts about matters of meer *Speculation*, (as whether ſuch a Propoſition be true or falſe,) and likewiſe Doubts about matter of *Fact*, (as, whether ſuch a thing was done or not done,) which do not relate to the Government of a mans own Actions, theſe doubts do not concern his Conſcience.

As a mans Conſcience is not affected with his own Actions under any other Notion, or Conſideration, than only as Gods Law is to regulate them, *viz.* as they are either commanded by that Law, or forbidden by it: ſo neither do a mans Doubts concerning his Actions affect his Conſcience any farther, or upon any other account, than only as Gods Law may be trangreſſed by doing or not doing the Action he doubts of; that is, as he may ſin againſt God, either by omitting the Action when Gods Law hath commanded it, or by doing it when Gods Law hath forbidden it.

So that in all doubtful Caſes, where a man apprehends no danger of tranſgreſſing Gods Law, whether he doth the Action he doubts

doubts about, or doth it not, there his Conſcience is not properly concerned.

And this is ſo true, that though we ſhould ſuppoſe one ſide of the Action in queſtion to be really, all things conſidered, more expedient and more eligible than the other, yet ſo long as we are ſatisfied that we may without breach of Gods Law chuſe either ſide, we are not concern'd in Conſcience to chuſe that ſide which is the moſt expedient, or the moſt eligible. For the truth of this, beſides the reaſon of the thing, we have the authority of St. *Paul*, who when this Caſe was propoſed to him, Whether it was better for the Chriſtians in thoſe times to marry, or not to marry? he thus reſolves it, That though indeed, as things then ſtood, it was better not to marry, yet they might do what they would; for if they did marry, they ſinned not: and though (as he ſaith) *he that gave not his Virgin in marriage did better than he that gave her in marriage*; yet he allows, that *he that gave her in marriage did well*, and conſequently did act with a good Conſcience. *Vid.* 1 *Cor.* 7.

3. From what hath been ſaid, we may be able to give a clear account of the Nature of a *Doubting Conſcience*, and to diſtinguiſh it from the other ſorts of Conſcience; particularly, that which they call the *Scrupulous*; which is our Third Point under this Head.

Conſcience is uſually, though how properly I will not now diſpute, diſtributed into theſe three Kinds, the *Reſolved*, the *Scrupulous*, and the *Doubting*.

When we ſpeak of a *Reſolved* Conſcience, every body knows that we mean no more by that Phraſe than this, that a man is ſatisfied and reſolved in his own Mind, concerning the action he hath been deliberating upon, *viz.* that he is bound to do it, as being a *Duty*; or that he is bound to *forbear* it, as being a *Sin*; or, that he may either *do* it, or *forbear* it, as being an *Indifferent* action, neither commanded, nor forbidden by God. Now this Perſwaſion, if it be according to the Rule of the Divine Law, we call it a *Right* Conſcience. If it be contrary to that Rule, we call it an *Erroneous* Conſcience: But of this we need ſpeak no more here, ſince it was the whole Argument of the former Diſcourſe.

As for the *Scrupulous* Conſcience, as that is made a diſtinct ſort of Conſcience from the *Reſolved* and the *Doubting*, we may thus define

define it: *It is a Conſcience in ſome meaſure reſolved, but yet accompanied with a Fear of acting according to that Reſolution.* It is the unhappineſs of a great many, that when they are pretty well ſatisfied in their Judgment concerning this or the other Point. which they made a Mater of Conſcience, and have nothing conſiderable to Object againſt the Evidence that is given them, but on the contrary are convinced that they ought, or that they may lawfully Act thus or thus: Yet for all that, when they come to act, they are very uneaſie, and make a world of Difficulties. Not that there is any new Reaſon appears that can pretend to unſettle, much leſs overthrow the Grounds of their firſt Determination: But only their unaccountable *Fears* muſt paſs for *Reaſons.* This now is to have a *Scrupulous* Conſcience in the proper Senſe.

But a *Doubting* Conſcience, (which is that we are now concerned in,) though in Common Speech it be often confounded with the *Scrupulous*, is quite different from both theſe ſorts of Conſcience. For in both thoſe a man is ſuppoſed to have paſſed a Judgment in his own Mind whether the Action before him be according to Gods Law, or againſt it. But in the Caſe of a *Doubting* Conſcience, it appears from what I have ſaid, that a man hath not, nor cannot, ſo long as he doubts, make any Judgment at all, but is uncertain as to both ſides; having, as he thinks, as many Arguments to incline him one way, as the other; and when once he comes to have ſo much Evidence as to create a *Perſwaſion* or *Opinion* on one ſide, then he ceaſeth to have a *Doubting* Conſcience.

So that a true Definition of a *Doubting* Conſcience, as it is commonly called, is this. *The Suſpence of a mans Judgment in a Queſtion about the Duty or the Sin of an Action, occaſioned by the Equal (or near Equal) Probabilities on both ſides.*

And likewiſe the true Difference between a *Doubting*, a *Reſolved*, and a *Scrupulous* Conſcience is this; That the *Reſolved* Conſcience is ſatisfied about its Point, and acts *confidently*, at leaſt *chearfully*: The *Scrupulous* Conſcience is likewiſe ſatisfied in the general, but either dares not act, or acts *fearfully*. The *Doubting* Conſcience is not ſatisfied at all, for the Point before it is ſtill a *Queſtion*; of which it can make no Judgment, no Reſolution, becauſe of the equal appearances of Reaſon on both ſides.

This

This is a plain account of the *Doubting* Conſcience. But after all, it muſt be acknowledged, that this which we call a *Doubting* Conſcience, and which we have been all this while diſcourſing of, is, truly and ſtrictly ſpeaking, ſo far from being any particular ſort or kind of Conſcience, as we have hitherto ſuppoſed it, that it is no Conſcience at all.

Conſcience, as we have often ſaid, is a *Mans Mind making a Judgment about the Morality of his Actions*; But that which we are now talking of, is a *mans Mind making no Judgment* as to that Point, but continuing wavering and undetermined. Now how a mans *Judgment* and his *no Judgment*, which are the Contradictories to one another, ſhould agree in the ſame Common Nature of *Conſcience*, is not eaſie to be underſtood. The Truth is, by the ſame Logick or propriety of Speech, that we ſay a *Doubting* Conſcience, we may alſo if we pleaſe ſay an *unreſolved* Reſolution, or a *Perſwaſion* without an *Aſſent*. But however, becauſe Uſe hath given the Name of Conſcience to the *Doubting* Mind; and becauſe Conſcience is ſometimes really concerned about Acting in *Doubtful* Caſes, I chuſe to follow the common way of ſpeaking.

II. I now proceed to our *Second* general Head, which is concerning the *Rule* of a *Doubting Conſcience*.

In ſpeaking to this, I ſhall do theſe two things. *viz.* I ſhall ſhew,

Firſt, What *kind of Rule* we here ſpeak of, that is, which Conſcience needs in a Doubtful Caſe.

Secondly, What that *Rule* is, or wherein it doth conſiſt.

1. As to the firſt of theſe. When we ſpeak of the *Rule* of a *Doubting Conſcience*, we do not mean ſuch a Rule by which a man ſhall be enabled to reſolve all his *Doubts* concerning every Point, ſo as that he ſhall ceaſe to doubt an longer concerning that Point: But we mean only ſuch a *Rule* by which a man may be directed how to determine himſelf in every *Doubtful* Caſe, ſo as to act with a ſafe Conſcience, whether he can get rid of his *Doubts* or not.

There is juſt as much difference between theſe two things, as there is between *Doubting*, for Inſtance, whether a thing in general be lawful, or not lawful; and *Doubting* what I am to do in a particular Caſe, where I doubt of the Lawfulneſs of the thing: The firſt of which *Doubts*, the Caſuiſts call a *Speculative Doubt*, the other a *Practical*.

It is plain, that a man may often very eaſily come to a Reſolution of this latter kind of *Doubt*; that is, be very well ſatisfied what it becomes him to do as to this preſent Action, without being able to reſolve his *Doubt* of the former kind.

Thus, for inſtance, a man may not be able to reſolve this Queſtion, Whether it be lawful or not lawful to play at Cards or Dice? which is the *ſpeculative* doubt, as the Schools call it: But he may be very able to reſolve this Queſtion, What is moſt reaſonable for him to do in the Caſe of ſuch a Doubt? Again, a man may not be able to reſolve this Doubt, Whether the preſent War in which his Prince is ingaged, be a juſt War or no? But yet he may be very well able to ſatisfie himſelf as to the *practical* Doubt; that is, what is his Duty to do in caſe his Prince command him to ſerve in that War, concerning which he doth thus doubt?

Now it is the Doubts of this latter kind, theſe *Practical* Doubts, as they are call'd, that Conſcience is directly and immediately concerned with, and conſequently, for the reſolving of which, it chiefly needs a Rule to direct it. For if a man can but get ſatisfied what is moſt agreeable to his Duty to do, as to the preſent Action he doubts about, it is no great matter as to his Conſcience, whether he can get his *General* or *Speculative* Doubts about that Action reſolved or no. Theſe kind of Doubts, if they cannot be *Reſolved*, muſt be *Over-ruled*.

The truth is, it is a very idle thing for men to talk, that a man muſt do no Action, till all his Doubts about it be reſolved. Thus far we grant it concerns him, that his Doubts ſhould be reſolved, *viz.* That he ſhould be ſatisfied in his own mind, that that ſide of the Action he determines himſelf to, is, all things conſidered, the more fit and reaſonable to be choſen: And to direct a Man in making ſuch a Choice, is our principal buſineſs under this Head. But if it be meant, that a Man muſt ſo reſolve all his Doubts about an Action, as to ſee clearly through all the Speculative Points which occaſion his Doubts, ſo as to be able to untie all the Difficulties which before entangled his Underſtanding, and from Intrinſick Arguments, drawn from the nature of the thing, to pronounce concerning the merits of the Queſtion: I ſay, if this be their meaning, there is nothing more abſurd than to ſay, That a man is not to do an Action till he has reſolved or depoſed all his Doubts about it.

For

For in many Caſes this is utterly impoſſible to be done; the perſon concerned perhaps having no ſufficient Means for the obtaining ſuch a Reſolution of his Doubts as we ſpoke of; or if he had, the Caſe may be ſuch as will not allow him ſufficient time of Conſideration for the doing it; for he muſt either act or not act preſently; and he is in equal Perplexity, both as to the one, and as to the other. What now in ſuch a Caſe can a Man poſſibly do more than this? *viz.* by his own Reaſon, and the advice of his Friends, to get ſatisfied what is moſt reaſonable, and moſt agreeable to his Duty, for him to do in the preſent Circumſtances, and to proceed accordingly; for as for other kind of Reſolution of his Doubts, as things ſtand with him, he hath not the leaſt Proſpect of it.

And indeed, when all is ſaid, we ſee *de facto* that this is the uſual way of proceeding among Men, even thoſe that are very Honeſt and Conſcientious. I dare ſay, if we take all the Doubtful Caſes that happen; where there is one Caſe in which a Man proceeds to Action upon ſuch a Reſolution of his Doubts as we before ſpoke of, there are ten Caſes where the Doubt is *overruled*, and the Man proceeds to Action without ſuch a Reſolution; ſitting down ſatisfied with this, that though he cannot anſwer the Difficulties on both ſides, yet, all things conſidered, it is moſt reaſonable for him, in the preſent Circumſtances, to act thus, rather than otherwiſe; for this he takes to be moſt agreeable to his General Duty; or this is that which Wiſe and Good Men, whom he hath conſulted, do adviſe him to.

And now having ſufficiently explained what kind of Reſolution of Doubts that is, which a Mans Conſcience ſtands in need of in order to his acting ſafely in a doubtful Caſe.

II. I come now to the ſecond Queſtion upon this Head, which is, What that *Rule* is by which we are to proceed in thus reſolving our *Doubts*, or determining our ſelves to one ſide or other, in any Doubtful Caſe that happens to us.

In anſwer to this Enquiry, I ſhall do theſe two things. *Firſt*, I ſhall give ſome account of the *General* Rule by which a *Doubting Conſcience* is to be guided. *Secondly*, I ſhall apply this General Rule to the ſeveral Heads, of Doubtful Caſes wherein a mans Conſcience may be concerned: That ſo every one may be furniſhed with ſome Principles, for the determining himſelf in any Matter concerning which he happens to have a *Doubt*.

1. As to the first of these, Whoever hath Considered what we have before said, will easily be perswaded, that nothing ought to turn the *Ballance* in a Doubtful Case, but the greater Weight of *Reason* on one side than the other. For since the very Notion of Doubting, is *the suspence of a mans Judgment in a Question, upon account of the equal appearances of Reason on both sides of it:* It is plain, that that which is to settle the *Judgment*, and to determine the *Doubt* can be nothing else but this, *viz.* That, after all things considered, there doth appear greater *Reason* to lye on this side of the Question, than there doth on that. So that the General Rule of a Doubting Conscience, and from which the measures of resolving all particular Cases are to be taken, cannot be laid down otherwise than thus. *viz. That in all Doubtful Cases, that side which, all things duely considered, doth appear more reasonable, that is to be chosen.*

I am not ignorant that the Casuists have usually proposed this Rule in other Terms. *viz. That in all Doubtful Cases the safer side is to be followed.* But I do purposely avoid the expressing it so, because of the *uncertain* meaning of the *safer side*? For according as that Word is expounded, (as it may be expounded different ways,) so is the Rule so worded true or false.

If we take *safety* in the strict and proper Sense, and as it is indeed usually understood, *viz.* as it is opposed to any *Hazard* or *Danger*: it is so far from being an Adæquate Rule of a Doubting Conscience, in all Cases to follow the *safer side*, that in many Cases it will be very unadvisable so to do.

Sure I am, that in Doubtful Cases which concern the *Civil* Life, no Wise man doth always make this a Rule to himself. We see a hundred Instances every day, where men venture upon the less *safe* and the more *hazardous* side, upon the account of other Reasons and Considerations, which they think ought more to prevail with them.

It is certainly, in general speaking, more *safe* (that is, more free from *hazard* or *danger*) to Travel on *Foot*, than on *Horseback*; to stay at *home*, than to go into *Foreign Countries*; to Traffick by *Land*, than to venture ones Stock on the uncertain *Seas*. But yet for all this, the consideration of the Ease and Expedition that is to be had in the first Case, and the Improvement and Benefit that is to be hoped for in the second, and the Gain and Profit in the last, do we see every day overballance the consideration

ration of *Safety* in theſe Caſes, and determine a man not to that ſide which is freeſt from *Danger*, but to that which is more *Convenient*, or more *Uſeful*, or more *Advantageous*.

And thus it is likewiſe as to thoſe *Doubtful Caſes* wherein a mans *Conſcience* is concerned. I ſuppoſe that when we ſpeak of the *ſafer-ſide* of any Action with reference to *Conſcience*, we generally mean that ſide on which there appears the leaſt *Hazard* or *Danger* of tranſgreſſing any Law of God. But now in this Senſe of *ſafety*, I do not think that it is always a good Rule, for a *Doubting* Conſcience to chuſe the *ſafer ſide* : On the contrary, I think, that if the Rule be thus put, and thus underſtood, it will often prove a Snare to a mans Mind, and rather entangle him further in Difficulties, than help him out of them.

If it was receiv'd as a Rule, That a man is in all his Actions to keep himſelf at the greateſt diſtance he can from the Danger of ſinning, (which is the Notion of *ſafety* I here ſpeak of,) I dare ſay, there are very few Perſons that converſe much in the World, but have reaſon, almoſt every day, to call themſelves to account for tranſgreſſing this Rule. For they do every day ingage in ſuch Actions, in which they cannot but acknowledge that they do expoſe themſelves to a greater danger of ſinning, than if they had not ingaged in them.

Thus, for inſtance, what man is there among us who, although he know himſelf to be prone enough to the ſin of *Intemperance* in eating or drinking when Temptations are offered, and accordingly for this reaſon doth moſt ſeriouſly ſet himſelf againſt this particular ſin, yet makes any great Scruple of going to *Feaſts* and *Entertainments* when he is invited by others ; nay or of making them himſelf, when *Decency* or *Civility*, or the ſerving any of his *Temporal* affairs doth require him ſo to do ; But yet it is certain, that by thus doing, he runs a much greater Hazard of falling into the ſin he fears, than if he ſhould forbear all ſuch Occaſions or Temptations of Intemperance.

Many other Inſtances which daily occur in Humane Life might be given, wherein good men, nay even the beſt of men, do for the ſake of their Buſineſs, or other Laudable Deſigns which they think fit to purſue, frequently venture to expoſe themſelves to ſuch *dangers* of ſinning as they might have avoided, and this without any Reproach from their own Conſcience, or any Cenſure from other Men.

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The truth is, God hath no where commanded us to avoid all poſſible *danger* of *ſinning*, but only to avoid all *ſin* when we are in *danger*. It is enough for the ſecuring a mans Duty, that he doth not tranſgreſs the Laws of God in any Action that he takes in hand: but it is not required that he ſhould in every inſtance of his Converſation, preſerve himſelf from the utmoſt poſſibility, or, (if you will) Danger of ſo doing. For upon this Suppoſition, it would be impoſſible for one to live like a man of this World, and perform the common Offices of Civil Life, and much more to live to any great purpoſes for the ſerving his Generation. Indeed the Reſult of all would be, That whoever would approve himſelf to be truly *Religious* and *Conſcientious*, muſt abandon all Secular Affairs, and retire to a Cloyſter or a Deſart.

But it may be ſaid, What is this to our Buſineſs? Thoſe we now ſpoke of are ſuppoſed to be fully ſatisfied in their own Minds, that they may ſafely venture on the more dangerous ſide of an Action, for the ſake of ſome conſiderable good that they deſign in that Action: But the Caſe we are now concerned in, is that of one who is altogether Doubtful whether he may Lawfully do the Action or no. To this I anſwer, That my Buſineſs is now to give an account of the Rule by which men are to proceed, in determining themſelves in Doubtful Caſes; and that which I have ſaid, doth thus far I think come home to that Buſineſs, that if it be allowed that it is adviſable in any Caſe to forſake the more *ſafe* ſide of an Action, and to chuſe the more *hazardous*; we will take it for granted, that it may be as adviſable in a *Doubtful* Caſe as in any other, until it be made to appear, that God hath appointed a Rule for *Doubting* Perſons to govern themſelves by, different from that he hath given to other men: Or, to ſpeak the thing more plainly, till it be made to appear, that thoſe who are ſo unhappy as to *Doubt*, are debarred of the priviledge of Acting according to the beſt of their *Reaſon* and *Diſcretion*, which men that do not *Doubt* are allowed to do.

But to come more ſtrictly to the Point. I do believe there do abundance of *Doubtful* Caſes, properly ſo called, frequently happen, in which no Man of Underſtanding, although we ſuppoſe him never ſo Honeſt, doth think he is obliged to determine himſelf to that ſide of the Action on which he apprehends there is leaſt Danger of ſinning: But on the contrary, he will often forſake

ſake that ſide which is *ſafer* in this ſenſe, for that which doth more recommend it ſelf to him upon other Accounts.

Thus for inſtance, ſometimes *Doubtful* Caſes do happen, in which the greater *Probability* on one ſide, will turn the Ballance againſt the greater *Safety* on the other. Thus if a Man ſhould *Doubt* whether it may be Lawful to eat any thing *Strangled*, or that hath *Blood* in it, (becauſe there are ſome Paſſages in the Scripture that ſeem to forbid theſe Meats); and ſhould repair to ſome intelligent Perſon about this matter, who ſhould give him ſuch an account of thoſe Texts, and of all the other Difficulties in this Affair, that the Man comes away ſatisfied, that it is far more Probable that all kinds of Meats are allowed by the Chriſtian Religion, than that any are forbidden.

I ask now, Whether this degree of Satisfaction have not weight enough to put an end to a Mans Doubt in ſuch a Caſe as this, ſo as that he may with a quiet Conſcience eat of theſe Meats as there is occaſion? I believe moſt Men will be of this Opinion; but yet the Doubt here is not determined on the *ſafer* ſide, but on the more *unſafe*. For it is certain, a Man is in leſs Danger of ſinning, if he wholly forbear theſe Meats, than if, for the ſerving a preſent Convenience, he do eat of them. And the Reaſon is plain; becauſe there are fair Grounds from the Scripture, and Antiquity, for making it a *Queſtion* whether theſe Meats be Lawful or no; and it is really yet a *Queſtion* among many, and it was lately ſo to the Man himſelf: But no man in the World ever made a *Queſtion* whether theſe Meats might not at any time be Lawfully forborn; there being no Law of God pretended that obliges a Man to eat of them.

Again, As a greater *Probability* will turn the Ballance againſt the *ſafer* ſide of a Doubt: So oftentimes ſuch Doubtful Caſes do happen, in which, when the *Probabilities* are equal on both ſides, the Conſideration of the greater *Temporal Advantages* on the one ſide, will have weight enough with a very Honeſt Man to over-ballance the Conſideration of the greater *Safety* on the other. [Still taking *Safety* in the ſenſe we before gave.]

Thus for Inſtance, Suppoſe one ſhould demand of another Man a Sum of Money which he pretends to be due to him, and the Man of whom it is demanded, after the ſtricteſt and moſt conſcientious Enquiry he can make, is not ſatisfied in his own mind that it is due. But ſuch is the Confidence of the Demander,

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and ſuch appearances of Reaſon he offers, that the Man comes to doubt *equally*, whether it be due or no; ſo that there are here equal *Probabilities* on both ſides. The thing in Queſtion now is, Whether it be adviſable in point of Conſcience for the Man to pay the Money demanded, till he have better Evidence of the Juſtice of the Demands?

If a Man be to follow the *ſafer* ſide, it is certain he muſt pay it. For it is undeniably more ſafe, that is, farther removed from the Danger of Sin, to ſatisfie the Demands, though it be to his own loſs. For by this means he perfectly ſets himſelf free from the Apprehenſions even of the poſſibility of wronging his Neighbour, which is the ſin that he fears in this Caſe. Whereas if he do not pay the Money, he is uncertain whether he detains the Mans Right from him or no.

But then, on the other hand, if he ſhould pay the Money when it is no way due, (as he hath as much Reaſon to believe that it is not due, as that it is), how ſhall he anſwer to his Wife and Children for parting with ſuch a Sum, which, as his Circumſtances may be, he cannot ſpare without great prejudice to them?

This is the Caſe, and theſe are the Arguments that are to be urged on both ſides of it. And I leave it to any conſidering Man to judge which ought to prevail. I am pretty confident, that moſt Men will thus determine, *viz.* That ſince in this Caſe it is as Probable, that the Demands aforeſaid are *Unjuſt*, as that they are *Juſt*; and ſince no man is *obliged* to depart from that he is poſſeſſed of, till it do appear by good Evidence that it is due to another Man: And ſince withal it is *unreaſonable* ſo to do, when it will be to the Prejudice of a Mans Self and his Family: Theſe things being ſo, it will be more adviſable for the Man in this Caſe to keep his Money till it be either by Law adjudged, or he have more convincing Proofs to his own Conſcience, that he ought to pay it.

I think I need not uſe either more Inſtances, or more Words, to ſhew that it is not always a *Rule* to a *Doubting* Conſcience to chuſe the *ſafer ſide* of the Doubt, taking the *ſafer ſide* for that which is at the greateſt diſtance from the danger of ſinning: It being abundantly plain, that many Doubtful Caſes may, and do happen, in which, though one ſide may appear farther removed from the Danger of tranſgreſſing Gods Law; yet while it doth

doth not appear that the other ſide is *unlawful*, and withal it is evident that upon other accounts that ſide is more eligible to a Prudent Perſon, no good Man (if he be but as *Wiſe* as he is *Good*) will make any Difficulty of waveing the *ſafer* ſide for the more *Prudent*, and that without thinking himſelf ever the leſs *Conſcientious* for ſo doing.

But after all this, If on the other hand, any man have another Notion of *Safety* than that we have now been ſpeaking of; that is to ſay, will enlarge the ſignification of the Word, and will call by the name of the *Safer ſide*, not that which hath only this to recommend it, that it is *farther removed from the danger of ſinning*; but that which is *freeſt from all Dangers and Inconveniencies of all kinds whatſoever*: So as that ſhall always be the *Safer ſide* of a *Doubtful* Caſe, which, after all things conſidered, doth appear to be moſt agreeable to the Mans *Duty* in the Circumſtances he is in, or which is attended with the feweſt *Abſurdities* and evil *Conſequences* of all ſorts, and doth beſt ſerve all the Intereſts *Spiritual* and *Temporal* taken both together, that a *Wiſe* and a *Good* Man can propoſe to himſelf: I ſay if any man do mean this by the *Safer ſide*, I do readily agree with him, that it will for ever, and in all Caſes, be a *True*, and a *Wiſe*, and a *Good* Rule (nay, I add), the *only* one, to a *Doubting* Conſcience to follow the *ſafer ſide*.

But then, in this ſenſe of *Safety*, the *ſafer ſide* and the *more Reaſonable* is all one thing. And conſequently, this Rule of following the *ſafer ſide*, and that I before laid down, of following the *more Reaſonable*, are the ſame in ſenſe, though differently expreſſed. Only I think this latter way of expreſſion is more plain, and leſs liable to miſconſtruction, and therefore I choſe it. But it is indifferent to me how Men *word* things, ſo long as we agree in our *Senſe*.

II. Having thus given an Account of the *General Rule* by which a man is to determine himſelf in *Doubtful* Caſes; I come now, in the *Second* place, to treat of the ſeveral Heads, or Sorts of *Doubtful* Caſes, wherein a Mans Conſcience is concerned, and to make Appplication of this *Rule* to them; and this it will be no hard matter to do, admitting the Grounds we have before laid down.

There is no *Doubt* wherein *Conſcience* is concerned, but it will of neceſſity fall under one of theſe two Sorts: It is either a *Single* Doubt, or a *Double* one.

We call that a *Single Doubt*, when a man doubts only on *one* ſide of the Action, but is very well ſatisfied as to the *other*. As for Inſtance, he doubts concerning this or the other particular Action, whether it be Lawful for him to do it: But on the other ſide, he hath no Doubt, but is very well aſſured, that he may Lawfully *let it alone*. Or, on the contrary, he is very well ſatisfied that the Action is Lawful, and that he may *do it*: But he doubts whether Gods Law hath not made it a Duty, ſo that he cannot Lawfully *omit* it. This is that which we call a *Single Doubt*.

We call that a *Double Doubt*, where a man doubts on *both* ſides of an Action, that is to ſay, he doubts on one ſide whether he be not bound to *do* this Action; Gods Law, for any thing he knows, made it a *Duty*: But on the other ſide, ſo is the Action circumſtantiated with reſpect to him, or he with reſpect to it; that he doubts whether he be not bound to *forbear* the Action as it is now preſented to him; Gods Law having for any thing he knows *forbid* it. So that he is at a loſs what to do, becauſe he fears he may ſin, whether he doth the Action or doth it not. I ſay, it will be impoſſible to put any doubtful Caſe wherein a mans Conſcience is concerned, which will not fall under one of theſe two Heads.

I. Now, as to the Caſe of a *Single Doubt*, we may thus apply the *General Rule*. That when a man doubts only on *one* ſide of an Action, there it is more *Reaſonable* to chuſe that ſide of the Action concerning which he hath no Doubt, than the *other*, concerning which he Doubts, ſuppoſing all other Conſiderations be equal.

And here comes in that famous Maxim which hath obtained both among Chriſtians and Heathens, *Quod dubitas ne feceris*; which, with the reſtriction I have now mentioned, will for ever be good Advice in all Caſes of this Nature.

It muſt needs be unreaſonable to venture upon any Action where a man hath the leaſt *Fear* or *Suſpicion* that it is *poſſible* he may tranſgreſs ſome Law of God by it, when it is in his power to Act without any *Fear* or *Suſpicion* of that kind; ſuppoſing all along this Conſideration of the poſſibility of offending by this Action, be not over-ballanced, and ſo the *Fear* of it removed by other Conſiderations which the Circumſtances of the Action do ſuggeſt.

Thus for Inſtance. Here is a Man Doubts whether it be allowable in a Chriſtian to *drink a Health*, or *put out Money to Intereſt*, or

or to *go to Law*; as having converſed with ſuch Men, or ſuch Books as do condemn theſe Practices, and that not without ſome Colour from the Word of God. The man is not indeed ſo convinced by their Diſcourſes, as to have taken up any *Opinion* or *Perſwaſion* that theſe Practices are unlawful; nor would he cenſure any man that uſes them, becauſe he ſees there are as Good *Men*, and for any thing he knows, as Good *Arguments* for the other ſide: But he is not ſo clear in his judgment about theſe Points, as to be able to pronounce any thing poſitively concerning them either way. He cannot ſay, that he believes them *Lawful*, though he is not perſwaded that they are *unlawful*, which is the true ſtate of a *Doubting* mind. Now in theſe and all other ſuch like Caſes the Rule is plain, That while a mans judgment continues thus in ſuſpence, it is more Reaſonable for him to forbear theſe Practices. For there is no pretence of obligation upon him from Gods Law to engage in any of them, and why ſhould he raſhly throw himſelf into danger, by venturing upon an Action concerning which he is uncertain whether it be Lawful or no? He runs no hazard by forbearing theſe things; but if he practiſe them he doth.

Thus far is right. But then, as I ſaid, this is always to be underſtood with this Proviſo, *Cæteris paribus*. For if there ſhould happen to be ſuch other Conſiderations in the Action, as have force enough to over-ballance this Conſideration of *Uncertainty*; it will then be reaſonable to chuſe that ſide of the Action concerning which I did before doubt, rather than that of which I had no doubt at all.

Thus if the Man that makes a Queſtion about any of the three things I before mentioned, ſhould light into ſuch Circumſtances, that, for Inſtance, he muſt either drink ſuch a ſingle *Health*, or a quarrel is like to enſue, nay, and that perhaps to the danger of ſome of the Lives of the Company. Or again, that he has no means of improving his Money (in which his whole Fortune conſiſts) in any other way but by that of *Uſury*, ſo that he and his Family muſt in time ſtarve, unleſs they be maintain'd by this Courſe. Or laſtly, if an Orphan be truſted to his Care; and the Eſtate of that Orphan is ſo entangled, that he muſt be put upon the neceſſity either of waging a *Law Suit* for the clearing it, or ſuffering his near Relation, committed to his Charge, to be defrauded of his Right. I ſay, if the Caſes happen to be thus cir-

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cumſtantiated; he that before doubted in General, whether it was Lawful to *drink a Health*, or to *put out Money to Uſury*, or to *ingage in Law Suits*; may, I ſhould think, certainly ſatisfie himſelf, that it is not only *Lawful*, but *Expedient* in this particular Caſe, notwithſtanding his General Doubt, to do any of theſe things; and if he be a Wiſe Man, he will make no Scruple of Acting accordingly.

Indeed he cannot be well excuſed if he do not thus Act. For it will not be ſufficient to ſay, I doubt whether theſe Practices are *Lawful* or *Unlawful*, and therefore I dare not ingage in them. Why Man? if you only *Doubt* about them, you do by this acknowledge, that for any thing you know they may be *Lawful*, as well as that for any thing you know they may be *Unlawful*. And if you be thus *in æquilibrio*, ſure ſuch preſſing Conſiderations as thoſe which are preſented in this Caſe, ought to turn the Ballance. Otherwiſe I do not know how you will anſwer either to your ſelf or the World for the Conſequences that may enſue. For my part, in ſuch Caſes as theſe I ſhould think, that nothing leſs than a *Belief* or *Perſwaſion*, that the thing in Queſtion is unlawful, will juſtifie a mans Prudence in Acting on that ſide which he calls the *Safer*, and which, had not theſe Circumſtances happened, would really have been ſo.

To conclude, if a great *Good* may be compaſſed, or a great *Evil* may be avoided, by doing a thing concerning which we have a *General Speculative Doubt* whether it be Lawful or no: This very Conſideration is in Reaſon ſufficient to ſilence the Doubt: That is, it is enough to perſwade us, that it is not only *Lawful* but *Adviſable* to do that in the preſent Circumſtances, which before, and out of thoſe Circumſtances, we Doubted in general whether it was Lawful to be done or no.

II. And thus much concerning the Rule by which we are to proceed in the Caſe of a *Single Doubt*; I now come to conſider that which we call a *Double Doubt*, and to ſhew what is to be done in that Caſe.

A *Double Doubt*, as I have ſaid, is this, when a man doubts on *both* ſides of an Action; that is to ſay, he doubts on one ſide whether he be not bound to *do* this Action, Gods Law having for any thing he knows commanded it; but on the other ſide, ſo doth the Action come circumſtantiated to him, that he doubts whether he be not by ſome other Law of God bound to *forbear*

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it as it is now offer'd: So that he is at a loſs what to do, becauſe he fears he may ſin whether he do the Action, or do it not.

That which is commonly ſaid in this Caſe, *viz.* That the Man that is entangled muſt get his Doubt removed, and then he may with a ſafe Conſcience act or not act, according as he is ſatisfied in his own mind; is, as I ſaid before, very often impertinent; For it is no more in a mans power to leave off Doubting when he will, than it is in the power of a *Sick* man to be *Well* when he will. And beſides, though it might be ſuppoſed, that the man with *Time* and good *Counſel* might be enabled to extricate himſelf out of this Perplexity; yet in our Caſe that Benefit is not always allowed: For perhaps the Circumſtances of the Caſe are ſuch, that the man is under a preſent neceſſity either of acting or not acting, and whether he doth the one or the other, he doubts he offends God.

But what then is a man to do in this Caſe? Why, he is to follow the ſame *Rule* that he doth in all other *Doubtful* Caſes, and which we have been all this while inſiſting on; that is to ſay, he is to *Act as reaſonably as he can*: And if he do this, I am ſure he incurs no blame, whether he do the Action he doubts about, or do it not. If there ſhould happen to be any ſin in the Action, it comes upon ſome other account than that of Acting with a *Doubting Conſcience*.

But now the Application of this *General Rule* to our preſent Caſe is various, according to the *Degrees* of the mans *Doubtfulneſs*, compared with the *Degrees* of the *ſin* he is in danger of, by acting on the one ſide or the other. And likewiſe according as other Conſiderations do happen about the Action, which ought to have ſome influence in determining the man. However, I think all thoſe varieties may be comprized in theſe *Four* following Propoſitions.

Firſt, If the *Sin* we are afraid of, in doing or not doing the Action, doth on both ſides appear *equal*, there we are to determine our ſelves to that ſide where we have the leaſt *Doubt* of offending God; that is to ſay, to that ſide which to our Reaſon appears *more Probable* to be free from the danger of ſin, rather than that other which is *leſs Probable* to be free from that danger: For certainly this will always be reaſonable, *that a man ſhould chuſe a greater Probability before a leſs*, ſuppoſing all other things equal.

But

But *Secondly*, If we doubt *equally* on both ſides; ſo that we apprehend that we are in like danger of tranſgreſſing Gods Law whether we do the Action or do it not: In this Caſe we are to determine our ſelves to that ſide on which it doth appear we ſhall be guilty of the *leaſt ſin*. For certainly, *by the ſame reaſon for which we are obliged not to ſin at all, we ſhall be obliged to chuſe a leſs ſin rather than a greater, where we cannot avoid ſinning*.

Thirdly, If the *Doubt* be *unequal*, and the *Sin* like-ways *unequal*; that is, if it ſo happen that one ſide of the Caſe is more *probable*, but the other ſide *leſs ſinful*, as not involving a man in ſo heinous a *Crime* as the other would, if it ſhould prove that he was miſtaken: In this Caſe a man may chuſe either the one ſide or the other; according as the degree of the *Probability*, or the degree of the *Sin*, compared with one another, do preponderate.

The Caſe may be ſuch, that there is ſo much more *Probability* on the one ſide than the other, and likewiſe ſo inconſiderable a difference and diſproportion between the *ſins* we are in danger of on each ſide, that a Wiſe man will be determined to the more *Probable* ſide, and venture all the conſequences of his miſtakes on the other.

But then, on the other hand, the Caſe may likewiſe be ſuch, that the *Conſequences* on one ſide, if a man ſhould happen to be miſtaken, are ſo terrible, that they will over-ballance all the *Probabilities* on the other ſide, let them be never ſo great; (ſuppoſing they do not amount to ſo much evidence as to create a *Perſwaſion*, and ſo put a man out of the ſtate of *Doubting*). Now here a Wiſe man will not Act on the more *Probable* ſide, but on that which ſets him free from the danger of theſe Conſequences. Thus if a Priſoner was tryed for a Capital Offence, and the Evidence againſt him doth not appear ſo full as to create a *Perſwaſion* in the Judge or Jury that the man is Guilty, though indeed it is more *Probable* that he is, than that he is not: In this Caſe I believe all men will ſay, that conſidering there is ſo great a diſproportion between the Evil of condemning an *Innocent Perſon*, and acquitting a *Guilty* one, (it being Murder in the one Caſe) the Judge or Jury ſhould rather follow the *ſafer* ſide than the more *Probable*, and ſo *clear* the man, rather than find him *Guilty*.

Fourthly, If the Caſe be ſuch, that the Man *doubts equally* on both ſides, and the *ſin* he is afraid of appears likewiſe to him to be *equal* on both ſides: Here other Conſiderations are to turn the Ballance.

Ballance. In this Caſe he is to conſider what *Prudential* Inducements he has to do the Action, or forbear it; as how far his *Eaſe* and *Quiet*, his *Advantage* and *Benefit*, his *good Name* and *Reputation*, his *Friends* or his *Family* is concerned one way or other; and ſince all other Conſiderations, that are of a *Moral* Nature, are *equal* on both ſides; thoſe of this kind, which are the ſtrongeſt, muſt add ſo much weight to the Scale, as to determine the Man either to do the Action he doubts about, or to let it alone.

And indeed, it cannot be denyed that theſe Conſiderations will often have a great Influence even upon a good Man, not only in the Caſe I have now put, where the directly Moral Arguments are equal on both ſides, but in all the other doubtful Caſes I before mentioned.

We may talk very rationally about the *Degrees* of *Probability*, and the *Degrees* of *Sin*, and what weight each of them is to have with us, and all this with ſo much Evidence, that no Man can deny the reaſonableneſs of the Rules we lay down *in Theſi*: But yet when we come to Act, we find that ſcarce any Man doth exactly proceed according to theſe Rules; but mixes ſome of theſe *Prudential* Conſiderations which I have mentioned with his Deliberations, and though they do not wholly, yet they help to turn the Ballance. And for my part, I dare not ſay, that all thoſe who thus proceed, are to be blamed for ſo doing; ſuppoſing that the Caſe wherein they thus Act, be a Caſe of *pure Doubt*, and there be no *Perſwaſion* on either ſide; and withal, that the Man who thus proceeds, is ſatisfied in his own Mind with his proceeding. The truth is, when all is ſaid, every Man in doubtful Caſes is left to his own Diſcretion; and if he Acts according to the beſt Reaſon he hath, he is not culpable, though he be miſtaken in his Meaſures.

Theſe are all the Rules that are to be given in the Caſe of a *Double Doubt*. And I think no body can object againſt the *Truth* of them. But I am ſenſible of another Objection that may be made, and that is, Why I do mention them at all. Since to the Generality of Men, for whom this Diſcourſe is intended, they ſeem altogether unpracticable. For how few are there who are Competent Judges of theſe different Degrees of *Probability* or *Sinfulneſs* in an Action that we here talk of, and much leſs are capable of ſo ballancing theſe things one with another, as to be able from thence to form a good Judgment upon the whole Matter?

But

But to this I anſwer, That if *Rules* are to be given at all for the determining Men in *Doubtful* Caſes, we muſt give theſe, becauſe we can give no other. Theſe being the only *Principles* that Men have to govern their Actions by in theſe Caſes. And I truſt alſo, they will not be wholly uſeleſs to the moſt ordinary Capacities, for the Purpoſes they are intended. Becauſe all may hereby at leaſt learn thus much, *viz.* What Methods they are to proceed by for the guidance of their Actions in Doubtful Caſes. And though they may have falſe Notions of the *Dangers* and the *Degrees* of particular Sins, and ſo may ſometimes make falſe Applications of theſe Rules to their own Caſe; yet it is enough for their Juſtification, as I ſaid before, that they have *Reaſoned* as well as they can. Since they are not bound to Act in Doubtful Caſes, according to what is *beſt* and moſt reaſonable in it ſelf: But it is abundantly ſufficient, that they do endeavour it.

But to render theſe Rules about a *Double Doubt* more intelligible and more uſeful, I think it will not be amiſs to give my Reader a *Specimen*, both how they are to be applyed to particular Caſes, and likewiſe when they are applyed, what light they give to a Man for the chuſing his way in any Doubtful Caſe he happens to be ingaged in. And ſince it would take up too much room to give every particular Rule a ſeveral Inſtance, I ſhall pitch upon one Caſe, under which I may conſider all the *Varieties* of a *Double Doubt* I have now repreſented; and it ſhall be that *Celebrated* Caſe of the *Sacrament*, than which we have not a greater or a more frequent Inſtance of this kind of Doubt in any Caſe among us. And becauſe I would not by the diſcuſſion of this Caſe, divert my Reader (againſt his will) from the main Argument, I have taken care to have it ſo marked in the Print, that every one may without trouble (if he have no mind to read it) paſs it over as a long Parentheſis, and go on to the next Point.

This is the Caſe.

'Here is a Man that believes it to be his Duty to take all op-
'portunities of Receiving the Sacrament, or at leaſt to take them
'frequently. But on the other ſide, ſuch is his condition, that
'he is conſtantly under great Fears and Apprehenſions of his be-
'ing unqualified for it; and to receive the Sacrament *Unworthily*
'he knows to be a great Sin: Not that there is any grievous no-
'torious Sin lies upon his Conſcience unrepented of; much leſs
'that he is ingaged in ſome vicious Courſe, which he is unwil-

'ling

'ling that his new Vows at his approach to the Lords Table ſhould 'divorce him from: For indeed he deſires and endeavours *in all 'things to live honeſtly*, and *to keep a Conſcience void of offence to-'wards God and towards Man*.

'But this is the Caſe, He is not ſo *devout* a Chriſtian, nor lives 'ſo *Pure* and *Spiritual* a Life, as he thinks becomes the Partakers 'of ſuch Heavenly Food. Or perhaps he cannot bring himſelf 'to ſo *feeling* a *Senſe* and *Contrition* for his paſt Sins, or ſuch ar-'dours of *Love* and *Devotion* to our Saviour, as he hath been 'taught that every worthy Communicant ought to be affected 'with. Or perhaps he wants *Faith* in the Blood of Chriſt, not 'being able to apply the Benefits of his Paſſion ſo comfortably to 'his own Heart as he thinks he ought to do. Or perhaps, in the 'laſt place, his mind is ſo haunted with a company of idle and 'naughty Fancies, eſpecially when he ſets himſelf to be more 'than ordinarily ſerious, that he thinks it would be a great Pro-'fanation of the Sacrament, for him to come to it in ſuch Cir-'cumſtances.

'Theſe, or ſuch like, are the things that trouble him. And 'though he hath ſeveral times endeavoured to put himſelf into a 'better condition, yet he could never ſatisfie himſelf, nor get 'over theſe difficulties. What now muſt this Man do? He would 'fain receive the Sacrament, as thinking himſelf bound to do it; 'but he dare not receive it, as looking upon himſelf to be un-'qualified for it. If he do not come to the Lords Table, he de-'nies his Attendance on the moſt Solemn Ordinance of Chriſti-'anity, and ſo doubts he ſins on that account: If he do come, he 'doubts he approaches unworthily, and ſo ſins upon that account.

'It is here to be remembred, that the Queſtion to be ſpoken to 'in this Caſe, is not this; What courſe the Man is to take for the 'Curing or Removing his Doubtfulneſs in this matter, that ſo he 'may come to the Sacrament with Satisfaction to his own mind: 'But this; Suppoſing the Man after all his endeavours cannot 'cure or remove his Doubt, what he muſt do? muſt he come to 'the Sacrament, or muſt he forbear? One of them he muſt do, 'and yet, which of them ſoever he chuſeth, he fears he ſins.

'If the former had been the Queſtion, the Reſolution of it 'would have been thus: That the Man is to uſe the beſt means 'he can to get better Inſtruction and Information about the *Na-'ture* and *Ends* of the Chriſtian Sacrament; and about the *Quali-*

'*ties* and *Diſpoſitions* that are needful to fit a man for it, particu-
'larly thoſe of *Faith* and *Repentance*. For it is the Mans Igno-
'rance or Miſtake about theſe things, that makes him paſs ſo
'hard a Cenſure upon himſelf, and ſo occaſions all the Doubt-
'fulneſs in this Caſe. If he once come rightly to underſtand
'theſe Points, his Doubts would of themſelves fall to the Ground;
'and the Man would be perfectly ſatisfied, that as his Caſe is
'(ſuppoſing it to be ſuch as I have now repreſented) he may
'without any Fear or Scruple in the World at any time approach
'to the Holy Table; becauſe he is indeed in ſuch a ſtate and diſ-
'poſition of mind as renders him *habitually* qualified for the per-
'formance of that Duty.

'But this, as I ſaid, is not the Queſtion before us; we here
'ſuppoſe the Man, either through want of *Means* of *Inſtruction*,
'or through ſtrong *Prejudices* from *Education*, or the like, to be
'incapable at preſent of this Satisfaction, and to be in great
'Perplexity on both ſides; and that which we are to enquire in-
'to is, to which ſide of the doubtful Caſe he muſt determine
'himſelf. Shall he *receive* the Sacrament doubting as he doth?
'or ſhall he *forbear* it doubting as he doth?

'Now I ſay, a man hath no other way of coming to a Reſo-
'lution of this Queſtion, but by applying the Rules I before laid
'down to his preſent Caſe: which may be done in this man-
'ner.

'Since the Man we ſpeak of doubteth that he ſins whether he
'come to the Sacrament, or forbear, the *Firſt* thing to be con-
'ſidered is, on which ſide he doubts *leaſt*; or which ſide appears
'to him moſt likely and probable to be free from the danger of
'ſinning: For, *if all other things in the Caſe be equal, the Ballance is*
'*to be turned on that ſide* according to our *firſt* Propoſition.

'Now if our preſent Queſtion be put upon this Iſſue, I am con-
'fident the Man, whoſe Caſe I am repreſenting, will think it more
'reaſonable to repair to the Sacrament, even in that evil poſture
'he takes himſelf to be, than cuſtomarily to abſtain from it;
'becauſe by thus doing, he doth certainly follow the more *pro-*
'*bable*, and the leſs *doubtful* or *dangerous* ſide of the Queſtion. For
'it is evident, he cannot pretend to be half ſo certain of this
'*Particular*, *viz.* That he is *unprepared* for the Sacrament,
'which is the reaſon of his abſtaining, as he is certain in the
'*General* that it is his *Duty* to frequent it.

'If

'If indeed the Man was a Perſon of ill Life and Manners: 'Or if he had been lately guilty of any Notorious Wilful Sin, 'and came to the Lords Table with that ſin upon his Conſcience 'unrepented of; Then I will grant, he had ſome reaſon to be-'lieve that he was as much in danger of ſinning, by receiving 'unworthily, as by withdrawing himſelf from Gods Ordinance. 'But the Caſe here is not ſo. The Man is really an honeſt well-'meaning Chriſtian, nor hath he done any thing of late, which 'can give him any ſuſpicion of his having forfeited that Title. 'Only through his Miſtake about the Notion of preparation for 'the Sacrament, he apprehends he is not qualified as he ought to 'be, though yet if moſt others were to be Judges of his Condi-'tion, they would ſay he was. Why? certainly in this Caſe, it 'muſt be evident to the Man that he runs a greater danger of 'tranſgreſſing the Law of God by abſenting himſelf from the 'Communion, eſpecially if he do it cuſtomarily; than if he 'ſhould come to it with all his *Fears* and *Doubts* about him. For, 'as I ſaid, his *Fears* and *Doubts* of his own unworthineſs, cannot 'poſſibly be ſo well grounded as his *Fears* and *Doubts* that he ſins 'againſt God by habitually denying his attendance on that great 'Chriſtian Service. For thoſe are founded on the expreſs Laws 'of the Goſpel: The others are founded only on uncertain con-'jectural Surmiſes about his own condition. That is to ſay, he 'is certain that he is bound to take frequent opportunities of pay-'ing his homage to Jeſus Chriſt in the Sacrament; but he cannot 'pretend to have ſuch aſſurance in his Caſe that he is unqualified 'for paying that homage.

'But Secondly, Let us ſuppoſe the *Doubt* is *equal* on both ſides: 'That is to ſay, that the Man hath as much reaſon to believe 'that he is an *unworthy Receiver* if he receives at all, as he hath 'reaſon to believe that it is a *Sin* in him if he do not receive. 'Which yet can hardly be ſuppoſed in our Caſe: but let us ſup-'poſe it, nay, if you pleaſe, let us ſuppoſe the Man doth *certainly* 'ſin, whether he *receives* or *forbears*: Here then this comes to 'be conſidered; which of theſe two *Sins* is the *leaſt*: To *Re-'ceive unworthily*, yet out of a Senſe of Duty, or *not to receive* at 'all. For on which ſide ſoever the leaſt ſin happens to be, to 'that ſide the Man is to determine himſelf according to our 'ſecond Rule. It being eternally reaſonable, *That of two Evils 'we ſhould chuſe the leaſt, when we cannot avoid both.*

'Now putting the Caſe before us upon this Iſſue, there needs 'no more to be done for the reſolving it, than only to ask this 'general Queſtion.

'Which is the *greater ſin* of theſe two; for a Man to omit a '*known Duty*, and ſo to break a *known Law* of God for *Conſcience* 'ſake: Or to yield *Obedience* to that *Law* for *Conſcience* ſake, when 'yet it ſo happens, that a Man cannot do that, without breaking 'another Law of God in the *manner* of his Performance of that '*Duty*? For my part, I ſhould think that the Man who doth this 'laſt, though he cannot be ſaid to be Innocent, yet is he guilty 'in a far leſs *degree*, than the Man that practiſeth the former, and 'a great deal more is to be ſaid in his juſtification.

'Let us ſuppoſe two Men, both of them conſcious to them-'ſelves, that as things ſtand with them, they are not in a fit con-'dition, ſo much as to *ſay* their *Prayers*, or to perform any other 'act of Religious Worſhip as they ought to do. Now one of 'theſe Men doth upon this account forbear all *Prayers* both *Pub-'lick* and *Private*, neither uſing his *Cloſet*, nor frequenting the '*Church*. The other hath ſuch a Senſe of what both Natural Re-'ligion and Chriſtianity do oblige him to in this matter, that he 'dares not forbear his uſual Offices either in *Publick* or *Private*, 'though yet he believes he ſinfully performs them.

'If the Queſtion now be put, which of theſe two is the bet-'ter Man, or the leaſt Offender, I dare ſay that all men will 'give their Judgment in favour of the latter, though yet no Wiſe 'man will think that this Perſon is to be excuſed for living at ſuch 'a rate, that he cannot *ſay his Prayers* without Sin.

'This Judgment, I ſay, men would paſs in this Caſe; and 'there is a great deal of Reaſon for it. For certainly, no indi-'ſpoſition that a man hath contracted, of what nature ſoever, 'will take off from his Obligation to obey the Laws of God. If 'a man cannot do his Duty ſo well as he ought, he muſt at leaſt 'do it as well as he can. And therefore let his Circumſtances 'be what they will, he muſt needs be leſs *Criminal* in perform-'ing a known Duty in the beſt *manner* that his Condition will 'allow him, though with many and deſerved Reflections upon 'his own *Unworthineſs*, than in wholly *omitting* or *diſuſing* that 'Duty. Becauſe a neglect in the *manner* of performing a Duty, 'is a leſs fault than to neglect the *Subſtance* of it.

'Let this now that I have ſaid be applyed to our Caſe, and

'we

'we have an eaſie reſolution of the Queſtion before us. *viz.* That 'ſince a *greater ſin* is to be avoided before a *leſs*, when a man ſup- 'poſes himſelf to be under a neceſſity of being guilty of *one*; it is 'more reaſonable that the man we ſpeak of, ſhould come to the '*Sacrament* with all his Doubts concerning his unworthineſs, than 'that he ſhould cuſtomarily and habitually withdraw himſelf from 'it, becauſe it is a greater ſin to do this latter than the former.

'Well, but ſome ſay, How can this conſiſt with St. *Paul*'s Do- 'ctrine? Who expreſly affirms, That *whoever eateth and drinketh* 1 *Cor.* 11. 29. '*unworthily, eateth and drinketh Damnation to himſelf.* Can there 'be any more dreadful ſin than that, which if a man be guilty 'of, it will actually *Damn* him? Certainly one would think by 'this, that a man runs a much leſs hazard in not Receiving at 'all, than in venturing to Receive whilſt he hath the leaſt Doubt 'that he Receives unworthily, conſidering the dreadful Conſe- 'quences of it.

'But to this I briefly anſwer. Such a man as we all along ſup- 'poſe in our Caſe, is in no danger at all of *Receiving unworthily*, 'in the Senſe that St. *Paul* uſeth this Term. For the *unworthy re-* '*ceiving* that he ſo ſeverely Cenſures in the *Corinthians*, was their 'approaching to the Lords Table with ſo little a ſenſe of what 'they were about, that they made no *diſtinction* between the *Ibid. v.* 29. '*Lords Body* and *common Food*: But under a pretence of meeting *v.* 20, 21, 'for the Celebration of the *Lords Supper*, they uſed the *Church* of 22. 'God as if it was an *Eating* or *Tipling* Houſe: Some of them Re- 'velling it there to that degree, that they went away *Drunk* from 'theſe Religious Aſſemblies. All this appears from the Text. 'But I hope none among us (eſpecially none of thoſe who are ſo 'doubtful about their being duly qualified) do *profane* the Sacra- 'ment in this manner.

'But further, Perhaps the *Damnation* which St. *Paul* here de- 'nounces, is not ſo frightful as is commonly apprehended. For 'all that he ſaith (if either the Original or the Margin of our '*Engliſh* Bibles be conſulted) will appear to be this, *He that eateth* '*and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh Judgment to himſelf.* 'Meaning hereby, in all probability, that he who doth thus af- 'front our Lords Inſtitution, by making no diſtinction between 'the Bread of the Sacrament and common Meat; doth by this 'his profaneneſs draw ſevere Judgments of God upon himſelf. 'For, *for this cauſe* (ſaith he) *many are weak and ſickly among you,* *Ver.* 30.

'*and*

'*and many are fallen asleep*: But here is not a word of *Everlasting Damnation*; much less of any mans being put into that 'State by thus *receiving unworthily*: Unless any man will say, 'that all those who are visited with Gods Judgments in this 'World, are in the State of Damnation as to the next. Which 'is so far from being true, that St. *Paul* in this very place affirms 'the contrary, *viz.* in the 32. Verse, where he tells us, That '*When we are thus judged* [in this World] *we are chastened of the* 'Lord, *that we should not be condemned with the World, i. e.* with 'Wicked men in another Life.

'But further, Admitting St. *Paul* in these words to mean *Damnation* in the usual Sense, yet still the utmost they can come to, 'will be no more than this: That *whosoever eateth and drinketh* thus '*unworthily*, as the *Corinthians* did, *is guilty of a Damnable sin.* But 'now there are a great many other Cases besides this of the Sacrament, in which a Man is equally guilty of a *Damnable* Sin, 'if he do not perform his Duty as he ought to do. He that '*Prays* or *Hears* unworthily; He that *Fasts* or gives *Alms* unworthily. In a word, He that in any Instance performs the Worship of God, or professeth the Christian Religion unworthily: 'I say, such a Man, according to the Protestant Doctrine, may 'be said to do these things *to his own Damnation*, upon the same 'account that he is said to *Eat* and *Drink* his own *Damnation* that 'Communicates unworthily in the Sacrament; though indeed 'not in so high a degree. That is to say, such a Man is guilty 'of a Sin that is in its own Nature *Damnable*, and may prove 'actually so to him, unless either by a particular or general Repentance he obtains Gods pardon for it. But yet for all this, 'there is no man will for these Reasons think it advisеable to 'leave off the practice of these Duties; but the only Consequence he will draw from hence, is, that he is so much the more 'concerned to take care that he perform them as he ought to do.

'But in the last place. Let the sin of coming to the Sacrament unworthily, be as great and as damnable as we reasonably can suppose it: Yet this is that we contend for, the sin of 'totally withdrawing from it, is much greater and more damnable. So that if he who partakes of it *unworthily*, doth *eat* '*and drink Damnation to himself*; He that partakes not at all, is 'so far from mending the matter, that he doth much increase 'that Damnation

'The

'The truth of this doth fully appear from what I have before 'ſpoke in General, concerning the much greater ſin of tranſ-'greſſing a known Law of God, than of obſerving that Law 'as well as we can, though with much unworthineſs. I will 'only add this further, with reference to this Particular of re-'ceiving the Sacrament.

'Though I am far from encouraging any to approach to the 'Lords Table without due Qualifications; or from extenuating 'any mans ſin that comes unworthily; (unworthily I mean in 'the Scripture Senſe of that word, and not as it is underſtood 'by many melancholly ſcrupulous Perſons) Yet this I ſay: That 'if Men did ſeriouſly conſider what a ſin it is to live without 'the Sacrament, it being no other, than living in an open af-'front to the expreſs *Inſtitution* of our Lord Jeſus, and a renoun-'cing the *Worſhip* of God and the *Communion* of the Church, in 'the great Inſtance of Chriſtian Worſhip and Chriſtian Com-'munion: And withal, what dreadful Conſequences they bring 'upon themſelves hereby, even the depriving themſelves of the 'chief of thoſe ordinary means which our Lord hath appointed 'for the obtaining *Remiſſion* of ſins, and the *Grace* and Influence 'of his *Holy Spirit*: I ſay, if men did ſeriouſly conſider theſe 'things, they would not look upon it as ſo ſlight a matter, vo-'luntarily to Excommunicate themſelves as to the partaking in 'this great Duty and Priviledge of Chriſtians; but what appre-'henſions ſoever they had of the ſin, and the danger of receiving 'unworthily, they would for all that, think it more *ſinful* and more '*dangerous* not to receive at all.

'I have ſaid enough in anſwer to this Objection from St. *Paul*; 'perhaps too much, conſidering how often theſe things have 'been ſaid, I will now go on with our Caſe.

'In the *Third* place, therefore let us ſuppoſe our Doubting 'Man, (for theſe or ſuch like Reaſons as we have given) to have 'ſuch a Senſe of his Duty, that he generally takes the oppor-'tunities that are offered him, of doing Honour to our Lord, 'by partaking in his Supper, though perhaps he is not often very 'well ſatisfied about his Preparation: But ſo it happens, that 'ſince his laſt Communicating, he finds his Mind in a much 'worſe frame than it uſed to be. He hath lived more looſely and 'careleſly than he was wont; or perhaps he hath been very late-'ly guilty of ſome grievous ſin that lies heavy upon his Con-

'ſcience

'ſcience: So that when his next uſual time of Receiving comes, 'he cannot but apprehend himſelf in a very unfit condition to 'Communicate in ſo ſacred a Myſtery. Upon this he is in a 'great perplexity what to do. For on the one ſide, he thinks he 'hath more reaſon to believe that he offends God if he comes to 'the Sacrament in theſe Circumſtances, than if he forbears; be-'cauſe he is more certain, that there is a Law of God that for-'bids him to come *unworthily*; than he is certain, that there is a 'Law of God that commands him to *receive every time* that he 'hath opportunity. But now, on the other hand, if it ſhould 'prove that he is really bound by Gods Law to Commemorate 'the Death of Chriſt in the Sacrament, every time that an op-'portunity is offered; He is ſenſible in that Caſe, it is a greater 'ſin to neglect this Duty, than to perform it unworthily, ſo long 'ſtill as he performs it out of Conſcience. What now is the 'Man to do in theſe Circumſtances.

'This is an exact Inſtance of the Caſe I ſpoke to in my third 'Propoſition; where on one ſide the Man runs a greater *danger* 'of ſinning, but on the other ſide, if he ſhould prove miſtaken, 'he ſins in a greater *degree*.

'Now for a Reſolution of this Caſe, I ſay; that if the Que-'ſtion be put concerning the Mans abſenting himſelf only *once* or *twice* from the Communion, in order to the exerciſe of Re-'pentance, and the putting himſelf into a better frame of mind, 'againſt another opportunity: The Anſwer (according to our '*Third* Propoſition) muſt be this, That it is very reaſonable 'thus to do.

'And there is good ground for this Anſwer. For certainly a 'Man is more in danger of ſinning, if he receive unworthily, than 'if he do not receive every time that there is a Communion; 'There being an expreſs Law againſt the one; but no expreſs 'Law obliging to the other. For Chriſt hath no more appoint-'ed that we ſhould *receive* the Sacrament ſo many times in a *year*, 'than he hath appointed that we ſhould *Pray* ſo many times in a '*day*; or that we ſhould give ſuch a determinate proportion of our 'Annual Income to Charitable Uſes. As to theſe things he hath 'bound us in the *General*; but as to the *Particulars*, the Circum-'ſtances of our Condition, and the Laws of our Superiors are to 'determine us. Only this we are to remember that the oftner we 'perform theſe Duties, it is the better; and we can hardly be ſaid

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'to be Chriſtians if we do not perform them *frequent-*
'*ly*.

'This now being ſo: Though it be true, that a Man would be 'guilty of a greater ſin, if he ſhould at any time, though but once, 'abſtain from the Communion, than if he ſhould come to it 'with ſuch *unworthineſs* as we are here ſpeaking of; ſuppoſing 'that Chriſts Law had preciſely tied him up to communicate e-'very time that a Communion is appointed: Yet ſince there is 'ſo little appearance of Reaſon to conclude that Chriſt has thus 'tied him up; and withal on the other hand, he runs ſo *certain* 'a *danger* of ſinning if he ſhould Communicate at this time, ap-'prehending himſelf to be ſo *unworthy* as he doth: This Conſi-'deration of the *certain danger* muſt needs in this Caſe overbal-'lance the other of the *greater ſin*, and make it appear more 'Reaſonable to the Man to ſuſpend his receiving to another Op-'portunity, againſt which time he hopes to be better prepared; 'than to adventure upon it in his preſent Circumſtances.

'But then if the Queſtion be put concerning the Mans abſent-'ing himſelf *Cuſtomarily* and *Habitually*, from the Lords Table 'upon this acount of *unworthineſs*; that which I have now ſaid, 'will not hold. For in this Caſe, the Man is in as much *danger* 'of ſinning by not *receiving at all*, as by *receiving unworthily*, nay, 'and a great deal more, as I ſhewed in my *firſt* particular a-'bout this Caſe. And withal he is guilty of a much *greater* ſin 'in wholly withdrawing from the Sacrament, than in coming 'to it, though with never ſo great Apprehenſions of his own un-'worthineſs, as I ſhewed in my *ſecond*. And therefore ſince the '*danger* is at leaſt *equal* on both ſides, he muſt chuſe that ſide on 'which the *leaſt ſin* lies: That is to ſay, he muſt Communicate 'frequently (at leaſt ſo often as the Laws of the Church do en-'join him), which is *three times a year*, though he be in danger 'of doing it unworthily, rather than not Communicate at all.

'Having thus gone through *Three* of our Propoſitions concern-'ing a *Double Doubt*: All that remains is, to put our Caſe about 'the Sacrament ſo, as that it may ſerve for an Inſtance or Illu-'ſtration of our *fourth* and laſt.

'Here therefore we are to ſuppoſe our Doubting Man to be in 'ſuch a Condition, that he apprehends he runs an *equal danger of* '*ſinning* whether he receives the Sacrament, or receives it not. 'And withal, ſo unskilful a Judge is he of the morality of Acti-

'ons, that he apprehends no great difference in the *degree* of the 'ſin, whether he do the one or the other.

'In this Caſe now, all the Man can do, is to conſider what 'Inducements he has in Point of *Prudence* or *Intereſt* to do or to 'forbear the Action he doubts about; for ſince all other Conſi-'derations in the Caſe are *equal*, thoſe of this kind are to turn the Ballance, according to our *Fourth* Propoſition.

'But if the Caſe turn upon this Point, I dare ſay no man 'will be long doubtful, whether he ſhould frequent the Sacra-'ment in obedience to the Laws, or forbear it. For it is plain, 'that he Acts more *Prudently*, and more conſults his own *Ad-'vantage* both *Temporal* and *Spiritual* by doing the former.

'As for the *Temporal* Advantages which a Man receives by 'obeying the Laws in this matter, I will not now inſiſt on them, 'though they are neither few nor inconſiderable. That which 'I deſire chiefly to be here conſidered, is this, That in point of '*Spiritual* Advantages, it is much more adviſable for our Doubt-'ing Perſon to come to the Sacrament, than to abſtain from it.

'For by frequenting this Ordinance, he takes the beſt method 'both to grow more *worthy*, if he be now *unworthy*; and like-'wiſe to cure the *Doubts* and *Scruples* he is now troubled with. 'But if he neglect this means of Grace, he not only takes an 'effectual courſe to increaſe and perpetuate his *Fears* and *Doubts* '(it being very probable that the longer he defers his receiving 'the Sacrament, ſtill the more *doubtful* will he be of his being 'qualified for it): But alſo is in great danger to loſe that ſenſe 'of Virtue and Religion that he now hath upon his Spirit; be-'cauſe he denyes himſelf the uſe of thoſe Means and Helps 'which are moſt principally neceſſary for the preſerving and 'maintaining it.

'Now I ſay, ſuppoſing all other things in the Caſe *equal*, this 'very Conſideration alone will prevail with a reaſonable Man 'to *come* to the Sacrament, rather than *forbear* it, even at the 'ſame time that he mightily *doubts* whether he ſhall not receive 'unworthily.

'Thus have I given a large Exemplification of all our Rules 'concerning a *Double Doubt* in this Inſtance of *receiving the Holy 'Communion*. If I have dwelt too long upon this Subject, I 'hope the Frequency and the Importance of the Caſe, will in 'ſome meaſure excuſe me.

III. Having

III. Having thus prepared our way by ſettling the *Notion* and the *Rule* of a *Doubting* Conſcience, I come now more directly to the main Buſineſs that is before us, and that is, to give an Account *what ſhare Humane Laws, Eccleſiaſtical or Civil, have in the Rule of a Doubting Conſcience, or what Power they have to over-rule a mans Doubts in any Caſe?* which according to the method I propoſed, is the *Third* general Enquiry I am to reſolve.

This is indeed the great Point that is diſputed between *us* and thoſe of the *Separation.* Nay, I may ſay it is the Point upon which that whole Controverſie turns, ſo far as a *Doubting* Conſcience is concerned in it. And therefore I ſhall diſcuſs it as carefully as I can; but yet in ſuch a general way as that what I have to offer, may ſerve for all other Doubtful Caſes of this Nature, as well as this which we are now concerned in.

Their Aſſertion *generally* is this, (*generally*, I ſay: For there are ſome of the Diſſenters, and thoſe as Learned and Eminent as any, who have declared themſelves of another Opinion) *viz.* That wherever a Man Doubts concerning the Lawfulneſs of an Action, that very *Doubt* of his is a ſufficient Reaſon to make him *forbear* that Action, though Lawful Authority hath commanded it.

On the other ſide, our Aſſertion is; That wherever Lawful Authority hath Commanded an Action, that *Command* is (generally ſpeaking) a ſufficient Warrant for a Man to do that Action, though he *Doubts* whether in it ſelf it be Lawful or no.

That I may ſpeak clearly to this Point; I ſhall *Firſt* premiſe ſome things in order to our more diſtinct underſtanding the State of the Queſtion. *Secondly*, I ſhall ſhew the Grounds and Reaſons of our Aſſertion. *Thirdly*, I ſhall endeavour to anſwer the Chief Arguments that are brought on the other ſide.

I. What I think needful to be premiſed for the right apprehending the State of the Queſtion, I ſhall compriſe in theſe following Particulars, by which it may be eaſily diſcerned how far we agree with the Diſſenters in this matter, and in what we differ from them.

Firſt, We do readily own with them, that no Anthority upon Earth can oblige its Subjects to *do* any Action which the Law of God hath forbidden, or to *forbear* any Action which the Law of God hath commanded.

Secondly, We agree likewiſe with them in this; That wherever any Subject hath taken up an *Opinion* or *Perſwaſion*, that ſuch an Action which his Governours have obliged him to, is againſt the Law of God; though it be a *falſe* Opinion or Perſwaſion, yet it will ſo far bind him, that he cannot in that Inſtance obey their Laws without offending God. But then we ſay, on the other hand, That though he cannot *Obey* without ſin, ſo long as this *Perſwaſion* continues; yet he is at the ſame time guilty of ſin in *diſobeying*, if he ſhould prove to be *miſtaken*; ſuppoſing that it was through his own fault that he fell into that *miſtake*.

Thirdly, We acknowledge further, That in a Caſe where a Man cannot be ſaid to be *Perſwaded*, that the particular Action enjoyned by Authority is a ſinful Action; but only he *Doubts* whether it be ſo or no: Yet if the Man hath a general *Perſwaſion* that no *Publick Law* will warrant him to act againſt his *Private doubt*; in this Caſe he can no more do the Action enjoyned without ſin, than he could in the former Caſe. But then, if this Notion of his be falſe (as it is my preſent buſineſs to ſhew that it is ſo;) he cannot be excuſed from ſin, in *diſobeying* his Superiors, unleſs upon the former account of *inculpable Ignorance*.

Fourthly, We ſay this farther, That a *Culpable Doubt* doth no more excuſe the doing an *Evil* Action, than a *Culpable Ignorance*, *i. e.* it doth not excuſe it. My meaning is this: If a man ſhould be ſo little inſtructed in his Religion, as to *Doubt* whether that which is *plainly enjoyned* by Gods Law be a *Duty* or no: Or whether that which is *plainly forbid* by Gods Law be a *ſin* or no: (ſo plainly, I mean, that it is the duty of every Honeſt Man to know this, and he muſt be moſt criminally *Ignorant* that can be ſo *ſtupid* as to make a *Doubt* of it). If, I ſay, in ſuch a Caſe as this a man ſhould *Doubt* whether the thing commanded by his Superiours was *Lawful* or no: We are ſo far from ſaying that a Man doth well in obeying his Superiours in ſuch an inſtance, where their commands do ſo manifeſtly contradict the Laws of God; that on the contrary, we affirm the man is highly accountable to God for all ſuch Actions that he doth, though they were done purely in obedience to that Authority which God hath ſet over him; and purely in compliance with this Principle we are now contending for, *viz.* That in all Doubtful Caſes it is moſt reaſonable to govern our Actions by the Commands of our Superiours.

Far

Far are we therefore from asserting, That whatever our Governours do command, the Subject is bound to perform, so long as he only *Doubts*, but is not *perswaded* of the unlawfulness of the thing commanded: And that if there be any sin in the Action, he that *commands* it is to answer for it, and not he that *obeys*. For we do believe, that in matters where a mans *Conscience* is concerned, every one is to be a *Judge* for himself, and must *answer* for himself. And therefore, if our Superiours do command us to do an Action which *their Superiour* God Almighty hath forbid; we are offenders if we do that Action, as well as they in commanding it, and that whether we do it *Doubtingly*, or with a *Perswasion* of its Lawfulness.

But then these *two* things are always to be remembred. *First*, That this is true only in such Cases where (as I said) a man is bound to know that Gods Law hath forbid that Action which his Governours do command, and it is either through his gross carelessness, or some other worse Principle in him, that he knows it not, or is doubtful of it. For wherever a man is innocently, and inculpably *Ignorant* or *Doubtful*, how the Law of God stands as to such a particular matter which Authority hath obliged him to; as neither having means to come to the knowledge of it; or, if he had, the Circumstances of his condition not requiring that he should so accurately inform himself about it: In such a Case as this, I say, a man cannot *formally* be said to be guilty of *sin* in obeying his Lawful Superiors, though the instance in which he obeys should happen to contradict some Law of God. For the *Law* of God here, is as no *Law* to him, that is, it doth not *oblige* him, because he neither knows it, nor is bound to know it. And *where there is no Law, there is no transgression.*

And then further this is also to be remembred, that when we own that a man may be guilty of sin as well in obeying his Superiours, when he only *doubts* of the Lawfulness of the Action commanded, as when he is *Perswaded* that the Action is unlawful: I say, this we are to remember, that when ever this Case happens; the mans sin doth not lye in his *obeying* his Superiors with a *Doubting* Conscience (which is commonly run away with): For the man would as certainly sin, if in this Case he did the Action with a *Perswasion* that it was Lawful; as he doth in doing it with a *Doubt* whether it be Lawful or no. But the sin

lies

lies here; *viz.* in doing an Action which Gods Law hath forbid; and which the man would have known to be an ill Action, if he had been so honest, and so careful in minding his Duty as he should have been. It is his Acting contrary to a Law of God, that here makes the *matter* of the sin; and it is his vitious criminal Ignorance of that Law which gives the *Form* to it. But as for the obeying his Superiours, whether with a *Doubt* or without one, that is no part or ingredient of the sin at all.

Fifthly, We add this further, That whatever Power or Right we give to our Superiours, for the over-ruling a *Private Doubt*, it is not to be extended so far as either to destroy the *Truth*, or to supersede the *Use* of those *Rules* I have before laid down in order to the directing a mans proceeding in the Case of a *Double Doubt*. For this Case of *obeying the Commands of our Superiours* when we doubt of the Lawfulness of them, being a *Double Doubt* as properly as any other, those *Rules* are here to take place as much as in any other instance.

And therefore where ever a mans *Doubts* are in this Case very *unequal:* That is to say, he apprehends himself in much greater *danger* of sinning if he *obey* his Superiors in this particular instance, than if he *obey* them not; as having abundantly more Reason to believe that their Commands are Unlawful, than that they are Lawful: In that Case we cannot say he is obliged to *obey*, but should rather *disobey*, supposing all other Considerations be equal. For no man is bound to *obey* his Superiours any farther than they command *Lawful* things. And therefore if it be two to one more *Probable* that their Command is *Unlawful* than that it is *Lawful*, it is likewise more *Probable* that a man in this Instance is not to *obey* them. And *a greater Probability, cæteris paribus, is alway to be chosen before a less*, according to our *First* Rule.

But, then though the Authority of our Superiours alone will not in this Case be of force enough to retrieve the Ballance which is so far inclined the other way, and to turn it on its own side; yet there may be, and very usually are, such other Arguments drawn from the Consideration of the *greater sin*, and the more *dreadful Consequences*, of *disobeying* in this instance, than of *obeying*, as will to any reasonable man out-weigh all the *Probabilities* on the other side (so long as they are not so great

as

as to create a perſwaſion) and make it reaſonable for the man rather to do the Action, how ſtrong ſoever his Doubts be of the unlawfulneſs of it (ſo long as they are but *Doubts*); than to *omit* it after Lawful Authority hath enjoyned it.

But however this happen; It is always to be born in mind, as before, that if it ſhould prove that our Superiours do command nothing in the particular Inſtances, but what they *Lawfully* may do; It will not juſtifie any mans *diſobedience*, to ſay, that he apprehended it was more *dangerous* or more *ſinful* to *obey* them, than to *diſobey* them: For our *Miſtakes* and *falſe Reaſonings*, will not take off from the Obligation that is upon us to obey our Lawful Superious in their Lawful Commands; unleſs, as I have often ſaid, we can ſatisfie our ſelves, that in thoſe Inſtances we neither were bound, nor had ſufficient means to underſtand better.

And now having thus cleared our way, by removing from our *Queſtion* thoſe things that are *Foreign* to it, and which indeed, by being uſually blended with it, have made it more intricate than otherwiſe it would be; we are pretty well prepared to propoſe our Point.

In the *Sixth* place then. Excluding (as we have done) out of our Caſe all thoſe Things and Circumſtances we have been ſpeaking of, with none of which we have here to do; the plain Queſtion before us is this.

Whether in the Caſe of a pure *Doubt* about the *Lawfulneſs* or *Unlawfulneſs* of an Action, where the *Probabilities* are on both ſides pretty *equal*, and where likewiſe the Man concerned, hath done all that he was obliged to do for the ſatisfying himſelf: Whether, I ſay, in this Caſe the Command of a Lawful Superiour ought not ſo far to over-ballance the *Doubt*, as not only to make it reaſonable for the Man to do that of which he doubteth; but alſo to oblige him ſo to do?

We hold the *Affirmative* of this Queſtion, and I now come to give the Reaſons why we ſo hold, which is the Second thing to be done under this Head.

II. Our Propoſition is this, That if Lawful Authority do Command us to do a thing, which as on the one hand we cannot ſay it is *Lawful*; ſo on the other hand, we cannot ſay it is *Unlawful*; but our Judgment remains ſuſpended, as having equal, or near equal Arguments on both ſides: In ſuch a Caſe as this.

this, though if we were left to our own Choice, we ſhould generally forbear the Action for the Reaſons I before gave; yet being Commanded by our Superiours, who by the Law of God have Authority over us; it is not only *reaſonable*, but our *Duty* to do it.

For *Firſt* of all, even in Point of *Humility* and *Modeſty*, though there was no other conſideration; one would think that a Subject owes as much deference to the Judgment and Diſcretion of his Superiours as this comes to.

So much influence as this, even a *Confeſſor* or a *Private Friend* hath over our Conſciences. In a Caſe where we are altogether uncertain on both ſides, we uſually ſo far ſubmit our ſelves to them, as to be ſwayed and over-ruled by what they adviſe; and that oftentimes not ſo much upon Conſideration of the weight and force of their Reaſons, as meerly upon this account, that we take them to be abler to guide us in theſe Affairs than we our ſelves are, as having better conſidered them, and ſeeing farther into them than we do.

I dare ſay there are few of thoſe we are now diſputing with, if a Doubt ſhould happen to ariſe in their Conſcience about the Lawfulneſs of any Practice in their *Trade*, or their other civil Concernments, and they ſhould upon this apply to ſome Friend of theirs, of whoſe *Learning* and *Prudence*, and *Honeſty* they have a good Opinion, and put their Caſe to him; but would (if the *Doubt* was ſo *equal* on both ſides as in our Caſe we ſuppoſe it) without any great difficulty be concluded and determined by the Judgment of the man they thus apply to; eſpecially if that Judgment be ſeconded by the ſuffrage of ſome other Learned Pious men, whom they have thought fit upon this occaſion to conſult likewiſe.

If now the Opinions of one or two *Private* men be of ſo much weight as to over-rule a *Doubt* about the Lawfulneſs of an Action, when the Reaſons on both ſides are equal: Is it not very hard if the joynt Reſolution and Determination of our *Publick Governours*, whoſe Office and Buſineſs it is to Conſult and Command for the Beſt, ſhould not in ſuch a Caſe have the ſame Influence upon the Minds of their own *Subjects*? Or would it not argue much *Self-conceit* and *Arrogance*, and a very *mean Opinion* of our Superiours, and a great *Contempt* of their Authority, to refuſe that reſpect to them which we give to every *private* Man almoſt that we think wiſer than our ſelves. *Secondly*,

Secondly, I desire that may be taken notice of, which the *Casuists*, and in particular our Excellent Bishop *Sanderson*, have urged in this affair, *viz.* It is a known Rule in Law, *That in all disputed Cases, he that is in possession of the thing contended for, hath the advantage of the other that contends with him, supposing all other things be equal.* In controverted Matters, the Right is always presumed to be on the side of the *Possessor*, unless there be a good Reason shewn to the contrary.

Thus for Instance, If I be in possession of an *Estate* which another man makes a claim to: And it is equally doubtful whether that *Estate* belongs to him or me, yet so long as I have the *Possession* of it, I have a good Title to it by the Laws of God and Man; nor can I without injustice be dispossessed of it, till my Adversary hath made it appear that he hath a better Title to it than I.

Let us now apply this Rule to our present Case. Here is a Contest or Dispute between the *Superiour* and the *Subject*, about a matter of *Right* as to a particular Action. The *Superiour* saith it is his *Right* to Command his Subject in this Instance, and accordingly doth Command him. The *Subject* saith that he doubts whether his Superiour hath *Right* to Command him in this Instance, because he doubts whether this Command be not against the Law of God.

But in the mean time the Superiour is in actual Possession of the Power and Authority to Command, though it be uncertain and doubtful whether as to this Instance he do not exceed the just Limits of his Power.

Why, certainly by the former Rule, so long as the Case is thus doubtful, the Subject must yield; and at no hand by his disobedience *dispossess* his Superiour of that Authority he is possessed of, till he be convinced in his own Conscience that he hath greater reason to *disobey* in this Instance than to *obey*; which in our Case it is impossible he should have, because we here suppose that the Reasons on both sides are equal.

But, *Thirdly*, If this Argument appear too subtile; let the Question before us be decided by the *Common Rule. viz.* That in all *Doubtful* Cases the *safer* side is to be chosen.

Now putting the Point upon this Issue, I ask which is *safest*, with respect to *Conscience*, for a man to *obey* his Superiours in

ſuch a *purely Doubtful* Caſe as we here ſpeak of: Or to *diſobey* them? I think this Queſtion will ſoon be anſwered by any Man that will attend to what I am going to repreſent, *viz.*

There is a *Plain* Law of God, and acknowledged by us to be ſo, that *Commands* us to *obey* our Superiours in all *Lawful* things: But as to the particular Caſe about which we are now ſuppoſed to *Doubt*, it is very *Uncertain* and *Queſtionable* to us, (even after our beſt endeavours to ſatisfie our ſelves) whether there be any Law of God which *forbiddeth* that thing which our Superiours have enjoyned us.

This now being ſo, we thus argue. If it ſhould prove that our Superiours do in this Inſtance command an *Unlawful* thing; yet the *hazard* we run in *obeying* them is very ſmall and inconſiderable, in compariſon with *that* we run in *diſobeying* them, ſuppoſing it ſhould indeed prove that they command nothing but what is *Juſt* and *Right*, and conducing to the *Publick Good.*

For by doing the former, by *obeying* our Superiours, the only *hazard* we run, is of tranſgreſſing ſome *Unknown* Law of God; ſome Law which doth no way *appear* to us; all that we can pronounce after our beſt enquiry, being no more than this, that it may be there is ſuch a Law, and it may be there is not: And therefore we may reaſonably preſume that if there ſhould indeed be ſuch a Law of God; it is either not of ſuch conſequence that we in our Circumſtances were bound to *know* it, or if it was, that we had no ſufficient *means* to come to the *Knowledge* of it: in each of which Caſes, as I ſaid, a Mans *Ignorance* doth excuſe the violation of the Law.

But now, on the other ſide, if in ſuch an Inſtance as this we *diſobey* Authority when it hath *peremptorily* laid its Commands upon us, we venture upon a much greater *danger*. For in that Caſe we run the *hazard* of tranſgreſſing a *Plain* Law of God; a Law of which no man can or ought to be ſuppoſed Ignorant; and withal, a Law it is of ſuch *Importance* and *Conſequence* to Mankind, that we may truly ſay, the very *Being* as well as the *Happineſs* of all Societies depend upon it.

Suppoſing now this to be a true Account of the *hazard* we run in Acting on one ſide or the other in our preſent Queſtion, I leave it to any indifferent perſon to Judge, whether it be not much ſafer in ſuch Circumſtances as we here ſpeak of to *obey* our Lawful

Lawful Superiours with a *Doubting* Conſcience, than to *diſobey* them with a *Doubting* Conſcience.

Fourthly, If there yet remain any diſpute in this matter, let, if you pleaſe, our Saviour's *Rule* determine it, *As ye would that men ſhould do unto you, even ſo do ye unto them.* We deſire no more favour for our Superiours, than this eternal Law of *Equity* will oblige us to.

If a man will but be ſo impartial, as to paſs the ſame Judgment in the Cauſe of Authority when he is a *Subject*, as he doth in his own Cauſe when he is a *Superiour*, we believe there would be preſently an end of this Controverſie.

For let men talk as gravely as they pleaſe about the *danger* of obeying the *Publick* Laws with a *Doubting* Conſcience, yet I dare appeal to themſelves, whether they would not think it very unreaſonable for any Domeſtick of theirs, over whom they have Lawful Authority, to live in Contradiction to the *Private* Rules and Orders of their Family, upon a pretence of *doubting* whether thoſe Orders were Lawful or no.

If a *Parent*, for Inſtance, ſhould command his *Son* to ſit *uncovered* before him; He would not take it for a good Anſwer from the young man, to ſay, Sir, I am doubtful whether it be not unlawful to uſe any ſuch Ceremonies to Men, and therefore I pray excuſe me, if I do not pay you that reſpect you require.

If a *Maſter* ſhould order his *Servant* to provide Dinner for him on the Lords Day; and he ſhould reply, I would do it with all my heart, but that I am in *doubt* whether it be not forbidden by Gods Word to do any Work on the Sabbath. I am not indeed *perſwaded* that it is forbidden, but in the mean time I am not ſatisfied that it is Lawful, and therefore till I be reſolved in this Point, I pray, Sir, be pleaſed to Pardon me.

Would now a *Parent* or a *Maſter* think theſe Anſwers Reaſonable? would he take them in ſuch good part as to think his *Son* or his *Servant* had done nothing but what they were bound to do in thus refuſing to obey his Commands? No, I dare ſay he would not, but on the contrary would tell them; you are my *Son* or my *Servant*, and you muſt leave it to me to judge what is fit for *me* to command and for *you* to do. I will take care to command you nothing but what is lawful and juſtifiable: But in the mean time, you muſt not think by your fooliſh *Doubts*

and *Scruples* (ſo long as you confeſs you *know* nothing unlawful in what I bid you do) to controul my Orders and Commands; that I think neither becomes *you* to do, nor *me* to ſuffer.

I dare ſay moſt men would judge this a very fitting and juſt Reply in ſuch a Caſe. And if ſo, it is a ſtrong Argument, that we are all naturally apt to think that in purely *Doubtful* Caſes, our Superiour is to be obeyed notwithſtanding our *Doubt*, and that if in any Caſe we think otherwiſe, it is where our own *Liberty* and *Intereſt* are concerned, and where conſequently we may be juſtly preſumed unequal Judges, as being prejudiced in favour of our ſelves.

Fifthly, Let me add this one Conſideration more, and I have done. If in meerly *Doubtful* Caſes, our Superiours have not a Power of Determining us; what will their *Authority* ſignifie? If it be not of weight enough when the Scales hang even to turn the Ballance; it is truly the lighteſt thing in the World. Indeed it is worth nothing; and there will not be left Power enough in thoſe that are to govern us, for the ſecuring in any tolerable degree the Peace and Happineſs of the Society they are to govern.

For I pray conſider, What can there be ſo wiſely Commanded, or Provided for, either in a *Family*, in a *City*, or in a *Kingdom*, but may be liable to exception, and become a matter of *Doubt* to ſome perſon or other?

There is nothing in the whole compaſs of *indifferent* things (and ſuch chiefly are the Matters of *Humane* Laws) but ſome Perſon or other will be found to *doubt* whether it be *fit* or *lawful*. And if ſuch a *Doubt* be a juſt Reaſon to deny Obedience to the Law or the Command, in what a condition are all *Families*, and *Corporations*, and *Societies* in the World? What will be the Conſequence of ſuch a Principle? Why certainly nothing but perpetual Jars, and Diſturbances, and Confuſions.

For Inſtance, If whenever a Prince declares War againſt his Enemies, it ſhould be ſuppoſed Lawful for any Subject to withdraw his Aſſiſtance from his Soveraign in Caſe he *doubts* whether that War be a Lawful War or no; in what a ſad caſe would that Prince or that Kingdom be, that is to be ſupported and protected upon theſe Terms? Every man is hereby made a Judge of the Merits of a *War*; and though he be never ſo Ignorant, never

ver ſo Unexperienced, never ſo unable to make a Judgment of theſe momentous Affairs of the Kingdom; yet if ſome Rumours or uncertain Stories have reached his Ears, that make him doubt whether this War was lawfully begun or no: Why he is upon this Principle warranted to deny not only his *Perſonal* Service, but his *Contributions* towards the Charge of that War. But theſe *Conſequences* are *intolerable*; and therefore the *Principle* from whence they flow, muſt needs be thought *intolerable* alſo.

III. Having thus given the reaſons of our Aſſertion, I come now in the *Third* place to anſwer the Arguments that are brought on the other ſide.

All the Arguments I have met with againſt the Doctrine we have been eſtabliſhing, may be reduced to *Three*; and of thoſe three, the *Firſt* I have prevented by my ſtating the Queſtion; the *Second* I have already anſwered in my Proofs of our Aſſertion: ſo that the *Third* only remains to be ſpoken to. However I will name the *two firſt*.

The *Firſt* Argument is drawn from the miſchievous Conſequences of our Doctrine. For, ſay they, If a man ſhould think himſelf obliged in every doubtful Caſe to be determined by the Command of his Superiours, it would be the ready way to involve him often-times in moſt grievous ſins. As for inſtance, if a man ſhould ſo *halt between two opinions*, as to doubt whether *Jehovah* or *Baal* was the true God, as the *Iſraelites* ſometimes did; and at the ſame time (as it then happened among them) the Chief Ruler ſhould command that *Baal* ſhould be worſhipped: Why now in this Caſe (ſay they) according to your way of *reſolving Doubts*, the man muſt be obliged to worſhip an *Idol*, and to renounce the true God.

This is the Argument. But it is no Argument againſt us: Becauſe in the ſtating of our Queſtion, we have excluded all ſuch *Doubts* out of it, as do proceed from a mans *Groſs* and *Criminal* Ignorance of his Duty (as it is Apparent and Notorious that the *Doubt* in this Inſtance doth). On the contrary, we are as forward to acknowledge as they, that if any man do an Action that is plainly contradictory to the Laws of God, it is not his *Ignorance*, and much leſs his *Doubtfulneſs*, that will excuſe him, though he do it in obedience to his Governours. So that though this Argument would fall heavy enough upon thoſe

that

that plead for an *Abſolute Blind* Obedience to Authority in all things *indiſcriminately*, (which no man of the Church of *England* doth): Yet it doth not at all touch us, who only aſſert, That where we doubt *equally*, whether an Action be Lawful or no, and have uſed our beſt endeavours to ſatisfie our ſelves how the Law of God ſtands as to that matter, there the Command of our Superiours is to over-rule our *Doubt*.

But further, to ſhew what little force there is in this Argument, which indeed hath made a great deal of noiſe; we will try whether it will not make as much againſt our Adverſaries, if they will give us leave to put the Caſe, as it ſeems to make againſt us, when *they* put the Caſe.

Let us ſuppoſe therefore, as before, that an *Iſraelite* was very *Doubtful* whether *Jehovah* or *Baal* was the true God: And let us ſuppoſe likewiſe (as we reaſonably may) that the King of *Iſrael* made a Law, that all the *Temples* and *Altars* of *Baal* ſhould be demoliſhed, and that *Jehovah* only ſhould be worſhipped. What advice now would they give to the *doubting* Man in this Caſe? Will they ſay that he muſt comply with the Kings Laws, and worſhip *Jehovah* only, while yet he is doubtful in his own mind whether *Baal* be not the true God? Why this is againſt their own Principle, and gives away the Cauſe to us. But will they then ſay, that while this *Doubt* remains, the Man muſt not *obey* Authority in worſhipping *Jehovah* only; but he muſt either worſhip *Baal* and not *Jehovah*; or both *Baal* and *Jehovah* together; Why, this is indeed agreeable to their Principle; but then I appeal to my Reader, whether according to their way of *reſolving* of *Doubts*, a man is not as neceſſarily ingaged in *Idolatry*, and other grievous ſins, as he is by our way.

So that you ſee this Argument concludes as ſtrongly againſt them, as againſt us. But in Truth it concludes nothing either one way or other, but is wholly Foreign to the Queſtion, as I ſhewed in my ſtating of it, whither I refer the Reader.

The *Second* Argument is drawn from the Limitations which God himſelf hath put to the Obedience we are to pay to our Governours, and it may be formed thus. God hath not commanded us to obey our Superiours *abſolutely*, and in *all* things; but only in all ſuch things as are not contrary to *his Law*: So that where ever we are *uncertain* whether the Commands of our

our Superiour be *Lawful* or no, we muſt at the ſame time be as much *uncertain* whether we be bound to *obey*: And if ſo, how can you ſay that it is any more our Duty to *obey* them, than to *diſobey* them, in a *Doubtful* Caſe?

To this we anſwer, That though we acknowledge that no Man is bound to obey his Superiours any farther than they command *Lawful* things: Yet when ever it happens that they command ſuch things as we *equally* doubt whether they be *Lawful* or no; there are ſo many weighty Reaſons to be given, why a man ſhould *obey* rather than *diſobey* in that Caſe, as will perſwade any Wiſe and Good Man to think it his Duty to *obey*. And for thoſe Reaſons I refer my Reader to the *Five* Particulars I before inſiſted on.

The *Third* and indeed the Principal Argument, is drawn from the words of St. *Paul* in the 14*th*. of the *Romans*, and the laſt verſe, *He that doubteth is damned if he eat, becauſe he eateth not of Faith; and whatſoever is not of Faith is ſin.* From whence they thus Argue, If it was a ſin in thoſe Chriſtians that St. *Paul* ſpeaks of, to eat any Food, though in it ſelf *Lawful* to be eaten, ſo long as they *Doubted* whether it was *Lawful* or no: Then, by parity of Reaſon, it muſt be a ſin to do any other Action, ſo long as we have a Doubt in our minds concerning the Lawfulneſs of it; and if ſo, it is not the Magiſtrates commanding that Action, that will make it ceaſe to be a ſin in us to do it.

This is the great Argument that is brought againſt our Point, and I ſhall give it a full and a juſt diſcuſſion: Becauſe, in truth, if we come clearly off from this Text of St. *Paul*; not only all that is ſaid againſt *Obeying Authority* with a *Doubting Conſcience* will fall to the ground: But likewiſe moſt of the difficulties which entangle and perplex the Caſe of a *Doubting Conſcience* in other matters, will be in a great meaſure removed.

But before I enter upon a particular diſcuſſion of this Text, with reference to our preſent Controverſie, it will be needful to premiſe ſome general Account of it, for the ſake of ordinary Readers, that ſo underſtanding before hand the *Caſe* which the Apoſtle ſpeaks to, and the meaning of the *Expreſſions* he here uſeth, they may be the better able to go along with us.

First,

First, therefore, I shall give an Account of the *Subject matter* of St. *Paul*'s Discourse in this Chapter. II. Of what is meant by *Doubting* in this Text. III. What is meant by *eating not of Faith*. IV. What is meant by being *Damned* or *Condemned* for so doing.

First, As to the *Subject Matter* of St. *Paul*'s Discourse in this *Chapter*; it is undoubtedly the Case of those *Jewish* Christians that were not so fully instructed in their *Christian Liberty*, but that they still believed all the *Ceremonial* Laws of *Moses*, concerning the *Observation* of *Days*, and the *Difference* of *Meats*, to be still in force, and to oblige their Conscience: Or at least they mightily doubted whether they did or not. So that whereas other Christians, who were better instructed, made no scruple of eating any kind of Food, though forbidden by the Law of *Moses*: These men had great Reason to forbear such kind of Meats, because they were *Perswaded*, or at least it appeared more *probable* to them, than otherwise, that they were bound so to do.

That this was the Case of those that St. *Paul* here styles the *weak Christians*, appears from several passages of this Chapter, nor I think is it much questioned by any. As for what is intimated in the second Verse, concerning their abstaining from *Flesh* altogether, and only eating *Herbs*; which would make one think that it was not purely their respect to the Law of *Moses*, but some other thing, which made them thus to put a *difference* between Meats; because by that Law, they were no more tyed from *Flesh* (excepting only *Swines-Flesh* and a few other sorts) than they were from *Herbs*: St. *Chrysostome* hath well obviated this difficulty, in the Account he gives of the Case of those Christians. 'There were (saith he) several of the Be-'lieving *Jews*, who taking themselves to be obliged in Consci-'ence by the Law of *Moses* even after their Christianity, did still 'retain the Observation of Meats, not daring wholly to throw 'off the Yoak of the Law: These now, lest they should be 'found out, and reproached by the other Christians for thus ab-'staining from *Swines-Flesh*, and the like, upon account of *Con-'science*; chose to eat no *Flesh* at all, but to feed altogether upon '*Herbs*; that so this way of living of theirs, might pass rather 'for a kind of *Fast* or Religious *Abstinence*, than for a *Legal Obser-'vance*. Thus St. *Chrysostome*; and to the same purpose *Theodoret* 'and *Theophylact*.

But

But if any one be not ſatisfied with this Account of that Buſineſs; but will further contend, that St. *Paul* here doth not only ſpeak to the Caſe of *Jewiſh* Chriſtians who were zealous for *Moſes*'s Law; but alſo takes in the Caſe of ſome *Gentile* Chriſtians at that time, who (upon a *Pythagorean* Principle they might have entertained) were *Averſe* to the eating any kind of *Fleſh*; as thinking all ſuch Food to be *Unclean*: They may, notwithſtanding what I have ſaid, enjoy their own Opinion. For it is indifferent to our Controverſie, whether the Perſons whoſe Caſe is here ſpoken to, were *Jews* or *Gentiles*. Only thus much appears plainly, that the moſt of them were *Jewiſh* Chriſtians, who, together with their *Chriſtianity*, had a Conſcientious regard to the Law of *Moſes*.

Secondly, As for what is meant by [*Doubting*] in the Text, the Reader may be pleaſed to take notice, that the word [διακινόμενοι] which we here tranſlate [*He that doubteth*] doth as properly ſignifie to *diſtinguiſh* or *make a difference*, as to *Doubt*, or Heſitate. And thus it is uſed both by Profane Writers, and in Holy Scripture, as particularly in the 22*d*. of St. *Jude*'s Epiſtle. *And of ſome have compaſſion, making a difference*, [διακινόμενοι] the very word in the Text.

The word [διακρίνω] *doth no where, either in* Scripture *or any other Author, ſignifie to* Doubt; *but moſt uſually to* Diſcern *or* Diſtinguiſh, *or* make a Difference, *as it is frequently uſed in the New Teſtament. Vid.* Matt. XVI. 3. Acts XV. 9. 1 Cor. IV. 7. VI. 5. XI. 29. *The word* [διακρίνομαι] *is ſometimes taken* Actively, *and then it hath the ſame Signification with* [διακρίνω] *i. e. to* make a difference. *As is plain, not only in St.* Judes *Text here quoted; but in St.* James, Ch. II. 4. *Where our* Engliſh *Tranſlation hath indeed very well rendred the Apoſtles* Senſe *thus* [*Are ye not Partial*]. *But if they had truly rendred his Words, they muſt have thus Tranſlated* [Do ye not make a difference?]

Again, ſometimes it is taken Paſſively, and then the Signification of it is this, to be Divided, *or* Severed, *or* Diſtinguiſhed. *And when it is uſed in this Senſe, it ſometimes happens that the* Engliſh *word* [*Doubting*] *doth conveniently enough expreſs it.* Doubting, *being indeed nothing elſe, but a Mans being* Divided *as to his own mind. And accordingly in ſome places, our Tranſlators have thus Engliſhed it (though I believe in ſome of thoſe, more proper words might be found out to expreſs its Senſe). But though in a* Few *Texts it be thus uſed in* Scripture; *yet I do not find that any Profane Author did ever uſe it in this Senſe of* Doubting. *And therefore unleſs there be evident reaſon, I do not know why we ſhould depart from the* natural *and* uſual *Signification of the Word in the Text we are now upon.*

Now conſidering the Apoſtles Argument in this Chapter is the Caſe of the *Jewiſh* Chriſtians, who were divided in their Perſwaſions about the *Legal* Obſervations, ſome making a difference between *clean* and *unclean* Meats, and ſuch like things;

and others making none : It ſeems every whit as proper and natural, and more ſuitable to the ſcope of the Place, to take the Word in this Senſe in this place, rather than in that other, according to which it is uſually tranſlated. So that the Text is thus to be rendred, *He that maketh a differenee* between clean and unclean Meats; *If he do eat* any thing which he judgeth to be unclean, *he is damned or condemned* for ſo doing, *becauſe he eateth not of Faith.*

And ſo probable is this rendring, that our *Engliſh* Tranſlators took care to put it in the Margin of our Bibles, as may be ſeen by every one. Nor doth it want good Authority, for the *Vulgar Latine* thus tranſlates the place, and not only ſo, but *Eraſmus Hentenius*, and generally all the Latine Expoſitors, if we may believe *Eſtius*, who yet himſelf interprets it the Common way.

Indeed I doubt not but this is the true Verſion of this Word in this Text. However I do not ſo much ſtand upon it, as to preclude any man from the liberty of taking the other if he likes it better. For though this way of rendering doth better ſerve our Purpoſe, (as quite putting an end to the Controverſie:) Yet our Cauſe doth not ſo abſolutely depend upon it, but that we may very well allow of the common Tranſlation ; as will appear hereafter.

Thirdly, As for the Word *Faith*, which is here uſed ; let it be taken notice of, that when in the verſe before the Text, the Apoſtle ſpeaks of *having Faith* ; and in the Text, of *eating* without *Faith*, or not of *Faith* ; and that, *whatſoever is not of Faith, is Sin* ; We are not to take *Faith* here in the large ſenſe, as it ſignifies a Belief in Jeſus Chriſt, or an Aſſent to Gods Revelations, particularly thoſe of the Goſpel ; which is the uſual Notion of *Faith* in the New Teſtament : But only for a mans *Aſſent* to the *Goodneſs* or *Lawfulneſs* of any particular *Action* that he takes in hand.

So that to *have Faith* about an Action, is to be perſwaded that that Action may be Lawfully done in the preſent Circumſtances, or at leaſt not to be Conſcious of any Reaſon that ſhould make it unlawful. And, on the other ſide, to do an Action *without Faith*, or *not of Faith*, as the Apoſtle here expreſſeth it, is to do an Action of the *Lawfulneſs* of which we are no way ſatisfied, but, on the contrary, think we have good reaſon to believe that it is an unlawful Action.

Fourthly,

Fourthly, Whereas St. *Paul* ſaith, that *he that doubteth* or *differenceth, is damned* or condemned, *if he eat*; we are to take notice, that that expreſſion is not to be underſtood of the *puniſhment* of his eating in the other World, (which is that which in common ſpeech we call *Damnation*): But only of the *guilt* of his eating as to his own *Conſcience*. Indeed there is no colour why our Tranſlators ſhould here uſe the Word [Damned], ſince [Condemned] is the natural Word, whether we conſider the Propriety of the *Greek* or the *Engliſh Language*: So that this is the meaning of the Propoſition. *He that doubteth* (with ſuch a Doubt as is here ſpoken of) *and yet eateth*; ſuch a Man is *condemned* for ſo doing. Condemned, how? why *condemned* of himſelf, (as the Apoſtle had expreſſed it in the verſe before), *condemned* of his own *Conſcience*, becauſe without neceſſity, having free power over his own Actions, he doth that which he apprehends to be ſinful.

I dare ſay, the Reader will be ſatisfied of the Truth of our Interpretation, as to both the laſt named Particulars, if he will carefully read the foregoing verſe together with the Text (as indeed they do but both make one compleat Sentence) and judge of one by the other.

St. *Paul* hath for a good while been addreſſing himſelf to the *ſtronger* Chriſtians, in order to the perſwading them ſo to uſe their Knowledge and their Chriſtian Liberty, that they might edifie the *Weak* Brethren among them, but in no wiſe give Scandal to any of them, and he thus concludes his Advice in this Chapter.

Haſt thou Faith? have it to thy ſelf before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himſelf in that thing which he alloweth: But he that doubteth (or maketh a difference) *is condemned if he eat, becauſe he eateth not of Faith, and whatſoever is not of Faith, is ſin.*

I dare appeal to any indifferent perſon, that hath read St. *Paul*'s foregoing Diſcourſe in this *Chapter*, whether the meaning of this whole Paſſage be not to this Effect.

Art thou ſo well inſtructed in thy Religion, as to be perſwaded that the Goſpel hath taken away all difference of Meats, and that thou mayeſt Lawfully eat of any Food that is ſet before thee? why, it is very well for thee; but then, be content that thou art thus perſwaded, and do not upon every occaſion

make ſuch an oſtentation of thy Faith in this matter, nor deſpiſe others that have it not; as to lay a Snare before thy Weak and Un-inſtructed Brethren, who are of another perſwaſion, to ſin againſt their Conſcience, by Acting as thou doſt. It is ſufficient for thee that God ſeeth thy *Faith*, and that thou canſt juſtifie thy eating to thy own Conſcience. For I can aſſure thee, it is no ſmall Happineſs for a Man to be able to ſatisfie his own Conſcience in that Action which he takes in hand.

[This is undoubtedly the meaning of that expreſſion, *Happy is he that condemneth not himſelf in that thing which he approveth.* That is, it is a great Comfort to a Man that his Conſcience doth not condemn him in that Action which he thinks fit to do. *In ea re quam agendam ſuſcipit*, ſaith *Grotius*; *In eo quod agendum elegit*, ſaith *Eſtius*; *En ce qu'il veut faire*, ſaith the late excellent *French* Tranſlation. And it is juſt the ſame thing that St. *John* ſaith in other words. *Eph.* I. 3. 21. *My Brethren, if our own hearts* (i. e. our Conſcience) *condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.*]

But then, (as the *Apoſtle* goes on) as to thoſe that are ſo uninſtructed in the Nature of Chriſtianity, as ſtill to make a difference between clean and unclean Meats; as it infinitely concerns *them* to have a care what they do; ſo it concerns *thee* likewiſe to have a care how thou layeſt a ſtumbling block before them. For in what a Condition would any of them be, if being tempted by thy Inſolent Carriage, and Unreaſonable Example, he ſhould through *Fear* or baſe *Compliance* venture to eat ſuch things as he judgeth to be *unclean*? Why, certainly he is both an ill and a miſerable man for ſo doing; becauſe he is *condemned* of his own *Conſcience*. For he eats not only without being convinced of the Lawfulneſs of his eating, but preſuming the contrary, and whatever is thus done againſt Conſcience, muſt needs be a ſin. This I take to be the true meaning of this whole Paſſage, for which, if need was, we might produce ſeveral Authorities, particularly that of St. *Chryſoſtome*, who gives much the ſame account of it.

Having thus given an account of the Text as it lies in the Chapter, and with relation to the Buſineſs that St. *Paul* had there in hand. I now come to conſider it with reference to our preſent Controverſie with the Diſſenters, and to take off the Argument they bring from it, againſt the Poſition we are now contending for. Their

Their Argument, as I ſaid, is this.

St. *Paul* here affirms, That whoſoever *Doubteth* about the Lawfulneſs of any particular *Meat*, and while that Doubt remaineth, eateth of that Meat, ſuch a man *Sins*, and is *Condemned* for ſo doing; becauſe he eateth not of *Faith*. If now it be ſo in this particular Caſe, it muſt be ſo in all other *Doubtful* Caſes; and conſequently in the Caſe of *Obeying Authority*, where a Man *Doubts* of the *Lawfulneſs* of the thing enjoyned. That is to ſay, Whoſoever, in any Caſe whatſoever, doth an Action of the *Lawfulneſs* of which he *Doubts*; he *ſins*, and is *Condemned* for ſo doing, becauſe he acteth not of *Faith*.

This is the Argument fairly put, and I ſhall now endeavour as fairly to anſwer it.

And firſt of all, I ſay, This Argument proceeds upon a falſe Ground. For it ſuppoſeth St. *Paul* in this Text to ſpeak to the Caſe of a *purely Doubting Conſcience*, (which is the Subject of our preſent Controverſie:) Whereas it may be made to appear with good Evidence, that it is the Caſe of a *reſolved Conſcience* only, that he here Treats of. So that this Text is wholly miſapplied by the Diſſenters, and makes nothing at all to the Buſineſs. For though there be indeed in this Text a very ſevere Cenſure of all thoſe that Act againſt any kind of *Perſwaſion*; yet there is nothing here ſaid that toucheth a mans Acting *Doubtingly*, either one way or other.

That this is true, appears from the Account I have before given of the *Subject matter* of the Apoſtles Diſcourſe in this Chapter; which is, the Caſe of thoſe Chriſtians who were not barely *Doubtful* and *Wavering* in their own Minds, whether they might Lawfully eat of ſuch *Meats* as were then Diſputed: But were *Perſwaded* they ought not; as believing that the Law of *Moſes*, which had declared them *Unclean*, was ſtill in force; or elſe believing them to be *Unclean* in themſelves.

That this was indeed the Caſe here diſcuſſed, ſeems very clear from the 2*d* and 5*th* Verſes of this Chapter, where the Apoſtle *ſtates it*; and more particularly from the 14*th* Verſe, where he gives a ſummary *Reſolution* of it; and in my Judgment the very ſame Reſolution that he doth in the *Text*. *I know* (ſaith he) *and am perſwaded that there is nothing unclean of it ſelf, but to him that eſteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.* So that it ſeems the Perſon whoſe Caſe St. *Paul* ſpeaks to, was not *uncertain*

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or *unreſolved* whether the Meats under Deliberation were *clean* or *unclean*; but he was *perſwaded* they were unclean, he *eſteemed* them to be ſuch, and he muſt of neceſſity do ſo, ſo long as he believed the Law of *Moſes* to be in force, as by all that appears in this Chapter he did believe.

But may ſome ſay, If this was the Caſe, why then doth St. *Paul* uſe the word *Doubting* in the Text? To *Doubt* of the unlawfulneſs of an Action, is quite another thing, than to be *Perſwaded* of the unlawfulneſs of it.

In anſwer to this, I refer my Reader to the Account I have before given of the Word [διακρινόμενος] which may as properly be rendred, *He that maketh a difference* between Meats, as *he that Doubteth* about Meats. Now if this *Verſion* be admitted, the ground of this Objection is quite taken away. And I ſee no reaſon why it ſhould not be admitted, ſince (as I ſaid) it is as natural as the other, and withal, it makes the *Apoſtles* Senſe to run more coherently with what he had ſaid before.

But further, Let if you pleaſe the common Tranſlation be retained; let the Text be interpreted of one that *Doubteth*, and not of one that *maketh a difference*: Yet ſtill this will make nothing againſt what we have now ſaid. For it is undeniably plain, that what St. *Paul* here calls *Doubting*, is in our way of ſpeaking a degree of *Perſwaſion*. My meaning is this. The *Doubting* which St. *Paul* here ſpeaks of, is not that where a mans Judgment is ſuſpended, upon account of the equal Probabilities on both ſides of the Queſtion, which is the proper Notion of *Doubting*, and that which we are now concerned with: But he ſpeaks of a *Doubt* ſtrengthned with ſo many *Probabilities*, that it wanted but very little of a *Perſwaſion*; or, to ſpeak more properly, it was a real *Perſwaſion*, though with ſome mixture of *Doubtfulneſs* in it. That is to ſay, the man had ſo ſtrong Convictions of the *Unlawfulneſs* of eating on the one hand; and ſo little ſatisfaction about the *Lawfulneſs* of it on the other; That if he was not fully perſwaded that it was a ſin to eat; yet it appeared by many degrees more probable to him that it was a ſin, than that it was not.

That this now was the Caſe, is evident beyond all exception, from the words that follow. *He that doubteth* (ſaith the *Text*) *is condemned if he eat*, that is, *Condemned* of his own *Conſcience*, as I ſhewed before. Now how could that be, if the man was not in

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ſome degree *perſwaded* that his eating was unlawful? It is certain no man can be further *Condemned* of his own *Conſcience* for doing any Action, than he doth *believe* that Action to be *forbidden* by ſome Law of God. To ſay therefore, that a man is *Condemned of his own Conſcience* for *eating*, muſt of neceſſity imply, that he doth believe his *eating* to be *unlawful*, and if ſo, it is certain he doth more than ſimply *doubt* whether it be lawful or no.

Well, But doth not the Apoſtle ſay in this very Chapter, *Let every one be fully perſwaded in his own mind?* What is the meaning of that, but that every one ſhould aſſure himſelf that the Action he takes in hand is a lawful Action, or elſe he doth not act with a ſafe Conſcience? And is not that the very ſame thing that is here ſaid, *He that doubteth is condemned if he eat, becauſe he eateth not of Faith*, or with a full perſwaſion? There is therefore good Reaſon why we ſhould interpret this *Text* in the proper Senſe of *Doubting*, the *Apoſtle* himſelf directing us ſo to do by this paſſage.

This is the moſt conſiderable Objection that can be made againſt our way of expounding this *Text*, and probably it was with a reſpect to that paſſage that ſo many Interpreters have Tranſlated it as they have done; but whether they had any juſt reaſon from thence ſo to do, is the Queſtion. Or rather I think it will be no Queſtion with any one who attends either to the deſign, or the words of the *Apoſtle* in that paſſage.

The paſſage is in the *5th Verſe* of this *Chapter*, where the *Apoſtle* is giving an Account of the ſtate of the preſent Controverſie. *One man* (ſaith he) *eſteemeth one day above another, another man eſteemeth every day alike: Let every man be fully perſwaded in his own mind.* So we render it, but how truly, I ſhall now examine.

It cannot well be conceived by the coming in of theſe words, that St. *Paul* had any ſuch thing in his mind when he writ them, as we would now make them to expreſs. It was certainly none of his buſineſs in this place to oblige the contending Parties to get *full perſwaſions* in their ſeveral ways, and then all would be right, for there was too much of that already amongſt them. Neither was it his meaning here to tell them, that if in any Caſe they acted without a *full perſwaſion* of the Lawfulneſs of the Action, they ſinned againſt Conſcience; for beſides that this is certainly falſe, it was nothing at all to his purpoſe.

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But this was that which he deſign'd in this paſſage, to perſwade both the contending Parties quietly to permit each other to enjoy their ſeveral *Opinions* and *Perſwaſions* (in thoſe little matters, which did no way concern their Duty,) without *Cenſuring* or *Judging* one another.

This now is a meaning that perfectly ſuits with all the other good advice he gives them in this *Chapter*, and this meaning he doth expreſs in as apt words as can be thought on. *One man eſteemeth one day above another, another man eſteemeth every day alike. Let every man be filled with his own mind.* Or, *ſatisfied with his own Perſwaſion.* The Original words are [Ἕκαστος ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ νοὶ (or τῷ ἰδίῳ νοὶ (without the Prepoſition) as is read in ſome good Copies) πληροφορείσθω]. Which, ſaith *Grotius*, is an *Hebrew* way of expreſſion, and ſignifies no more than this, *Quiſq; fruatur ſua Sententia.* Let every Man enjoy his own Opinion; Or, as the *Vulgar Latin* moſt properly Tranſlates, *Unuſquiſq; in ſuo ſenſu abundet. i. e.* Let every one abound in his own Senſe: Or laſtly, as the Commentaries that go under the Name of St. *Ambroſe*, *Unuſquiſq; remittatur ſuis Conſiliis*, Let every one be left to his own Counſels. And to the ſame ſenſe alſo both St. *Chryſoſtome* and *Theodoret* do expound this paſſage. This Interpretation, though it be very different from that in our *Engliſh* Bible, yet expreſſeth the Signification of the Original Text as well as that, and withal, hath better Authority to recommend it: but that which we chiefly ſtand upon, is, that the Subject Matter, and the ſcope of the Apoſtle doth neceſſarily require this Interpretation.

For, in truth, If this paſſage be rendred the common way, ſo as that it ſhall import that every Man, in every Caſe, is to be *fully perſwaded in his own mind*, I do not know how the Precept here given, can be ſuppoſed to be either *Reaſonable* or *Poſſible*. It is certainly no more in every Mans Power to be *ſatisfied* about all his *Doubts*; than it is to *believe* or *disbelieve* what he pleaſes. When there appears Reaſon of *Doubting*, it is in vain to command a Man not to *Doubt*. Nay, it is as much a Mans Duty to *Doubt*, and to keep his Judgment in ſuſpence, when the weight of *Probability* is on both ſides equal, as it is to *believe* or to *disbelieve* upon clear Evidence. Or rather in that Caſe a Man cannot chuſe but Doubt. He cannot *reaſonably*, nay, he cannot *poſſibly* do otherwiſe.

I think, by what hath been ſaid, it doth plainly appear, that this Text of St. *Paul* we are upon, [*viz. He that Doubteth is condemned if he eat*] hath nothing to do with a *Doubting* Conſcience in our Senſe; but only with a *reſolved* one; and conſequently, that the Argument which is brought from hence againſt our Aſſertion, is nothing at all to the purpoſe, becauſe it is grounded upon a falſe Expoſition of the Text.

But though this is (as I think) the true Anſwer to this Argument; and the Anſwer indeed which I mainly ſtand upon: Yet there is another Anſwer given to it by the Caſuiſts; which, becauſe it is the Anſwer that our Learned Biſhop *Sanderſon* thought fit to pitch upon, I ought not to paſs it by without mention, nor, if I can, without ſome improvement.

I muſt confeſs, if we do admit this Anſwer, the *Authority* and *Obligation* of a *Doubting* Conſcience will be ſet higher than I do in this Diſcourſe ſuppoſe it: But however, it may be a good Anſwer to the Diſſenters, becauſe it unties the difficulty upon their own Principles: The Anſwer is this.

2. In the *Second* place, Allowing that the Man whoſe Caſe St. *Paul* ſpeaks to in this Text, was really a *Doubting* Perſon, and not one that was *Perſwaded* (as we have hitherto ſuppoſed): Yet it doth by no means follow, that, becauſe this Man was guilty of *Sin*, and *Condemned* for *eating* thoſe Meats, of the Lawfulneſs of which he *Doubted*: Therefore a Man that *Obeys* Authority in an Inſtance where he *Doubts* of the Lawfulneſs of the Command; that ſuch a Man *Sins* and is *Condemned* for ſo doing. This, I ſay, doth not at all follow.

For there is a vaſt Diſparity in the Caſes; and to argue from one to the other, is to argue from a *Particular* to an *Univerſal*, or from *one* Particular to *another*, without reſpect to the different Circumſtances of each Caſe; which is againſt all the Rules of *Logick*.

If St. *Paul* had ſaid, [He that Doubteth is Damned if he *Act*] there had been ſome pretence for making his Sentence an *univerſal* Propoſition, ſo as to extend to all *Doubting* Men in all Caſes: But now only ſaying, [He that Doubteth is Damned if he *eat*] it ſhews that he only ſpoke to the *Particular* Caſe that was before him; and that other Caſes are no farther concerned in his Propoſition, than as they do agree in *Circumſtances* with the Caſe he there ſpeaks to.

Now the *Caſe* the Apoſtle there treats of, and *That* which we are now concerned about, are ſo far from any way agreeing in the main *Circumſtances*, by which a Man is to meaſure the *Goodneſs* or the *Badneſs* of an Action, that there cannot be two *Doubtful* Caſes put, that are more *different*, as I ſhall now ſhew.

If St. *Paul* do at all here ſpeak to the Caſe of a *Doubting* Man; he ſpeaks of one that Acted *Doubtingly* in a matter where it was in his own Power to Act without a *Doubt*: That is, He was in ſuch Circumſtances, that he knew he might certainly without ſin refuſe to eat thoſe Meats concerning which he doubted; for there was no colour of obligation upon him to eat them: But yet in this Caſe, where he was perfectly at Liberty to let alone; for the ſerving ſome evil unwarrantable ends, he would not chuſe that ſide which was *ſafe*, and where he need fear no ſin, which was to *forbear*; but would chuſe that ſide that was *Doubtful*, that is, would run a needleſs hazard of tranſgreſſing ſome Law of God. It is of ſuch a Man, and in ſuch a Caſe as this, that St. *Paul* ſpeaks, when he ſaith, *He that doubteth is condemned if he eat*: Suppoſing indeed that his words are at all to be expounded in this Senſe.

But now becauſe it is thus in this Caſe (and in all ſuch like, if you pleaſe): Doth it therefore follow from theſe words, that a Man that is in other Circumſtances; that is not at Liberty to chuſe his own way; as not being at his own diſpoſal, but under the Direction and Government of Authority: That this man *ſins* and is *condemned* if he obey the Orders of his Superiours, when he is Doubtful of the Lawfulneſs of the thing in which he expreſſeth his Obedience? No, by no means. For this Caſe hath a quite different Conſideration.

In the former Caſe there was only *danger* on *one ſide*, and that was in *Acting*, and the Man might *forbear* if he pleaſed, and that without any *danger*: But in the other Caſe there is *danger* on *both* ſides, and the man runs at leaſt as great a *hazard* in *forbearing* the Action, (nay, we ſay, a much greater,) as if he ſhould do it.

So that undeniably (unleſs we will make one Rule to ſerve for all Caſes, though never ſo different, which is the abſurdeſt thing in the World:) For any thing that St. *Paul* hath here ſaid to the contrary; this latter man *may* not only without ſin do the thing he doubts of; but is *bound* to do it. Whereas, if the other man

man ſpoken of in the Text, ſhould do the Action he *doubts* of, it might be a ſin in him.

But further, That St. *Paul* meant not to extend his Propoſition to all *Doubtful* Caſes, but only to ſuch Caſes as he here treats of; is pretty evident from the Reaſon that he gives, why he that *eateth* Doubtingly *ſins* in ſo doing; *viz. Becauſe he eateth not of Faith.*

He doth not ſay, *He that Doubteth is Condemned if he eat, becauſe he eateth* with a *Doubting* Conſcience. If he had ſaid ſo, I grant the Reaſon of his Propoſition would have reached all *Doubting* men in all *Caſes*; but this is that which he ſaith, *He that Doubteth is condemned if he eat, becauſe he eateth not of Faith.*

So that if there be any *Doubtful* Caſes wherein a Man may *Act* with *Faith* notwithſtanding his *Doubt*: I hope it will be allowed, that thoſe Caſes are excepted out of St. *Paul*'s Propoſition.

Now, that there are ſuch Caſes; and that our Caſe of *Obeying Authority* is one of them, I thus prove.

Whoſoever ſo Acts, as that he is ſatisfied in his own mind, that what he doth is according to his Duty in the preſent Circumſtances: Such a Man Acts with *Faith* in reference to that Action. This is evident from the very Notion of *Faith*, as it is here ſpoken of, of which I have before given an Account.

But now it is very poſſible, that a Man may have a *Doubt* concerning the Lawfulneſs of an Action, and yet be in ſuch Circumſtances, as that he ſhall be ſatisfied that is very *reaſonable* and *agreeable* to his *Duty*, nay, (as the Caſe may be) that he is really *bound* to do that Action concerning which he thus *Doubts*, rather than not to do it: Becauſe the not doing that Action, all things conſidered, appears to him more *dangerous*, or attended with worſe *Conſequences*.

This now being granted, it undeniably follows; That whereever a man lights into theſe Circumſtances, he is not a *Sinner*, even according to the ſtricteſt Senſe of theſe words, though he Act with ſome kind of Doubt, becauſe he Acts in *Faith*; That is, he is *reſolved* in his own Conſcience, that thus it behoveth him to act in the preſent Caſe, and that it would be *unreaſonable* or *ſinful* to act otherwiſe.

So that let our Adverſaries make the moſt of St. *Paul*'s words that they can, it is a very *Illogical* Inference, to ſay, That whoever Acts with a *Doubt* upon his Conſcience in any Caſe, is

guilty of Sin; and much more is it ſo, to affirm it in our preſent Caſe of *Obeying Authority*. For it is certain, that many Men are (and I believe all Men may be) ſatisfied, that in a purely *doubtful* Caſe, it is not only more *reaſonable*, but their *Duty* to Obey their Superiours.

Well, But it will be ſaid, Do not we here talk contradictions? Can a Man have *Faith* about an Action, that is, be *reſolved* in his own Conſcience that ſuch an Action is to be done, or may lawfully be done, and yet *Doubt* concerning it at the ſame time?

I Anſwer, This is ſo far from being a Contradiction, that it is a Caſe that every day happens, where a Man hath a *Doubt* on both ſides, as it is in the Inſtance before us. A man often hath very great Doubts of the Lawfulneſs of this or the other Action, when he conſiders the Action in general: But yet when he comes to weigh the Circumſtances he is in, and the Reaſons he hath in thoſe Circumſtances for the doing the Action; he may be perſwaded, that it is better for him to do the Action, than to let it alone, notwithſtanding all the Doubts he hath about it. That is, Though he doubt of the Lawfulneſs of the Action it ſelf, conſidered without his preſent Circumſtances; yet as it comes Circumſtantiated to him, he doth not doubt but it may be lawfully done by him. But of this I have ſpoke largely before, in my Explication of the Rule of a Doubting Conſcience.

But is not all *Doubting* contrary to *Faith*? I anſwer, No, it is not: For ſuch kind of *Doubting* as we here ſpeak of, doth, we ſee, very well conſiſt with *Faith*. My meaning is, it is not neceſſary, in order to a Mans having *Faith* about an Action, that all his *Doubts* concerning that Action ſhould be *deſtroyed*; it is abundantly ſufficient that they be *over-ballanced*.

That which I would ſay, is this. Wherever a man hath ſuch a degree of *Perſwaſion* touching any Action he is deliberating about, that he believes it more adviſable to a reaſonable man, all things conſidered, to *do* that Action, than to *forbear* it; ſuch a man hath all the *Faith* that is needful to the doing that Action with a ſafe Conſcience; though in the mean time he may have ſuch *Doubts* concerning that Action, as will perhaps be too hard for him to *reſolve*, and will create him likewiſe ſome trouble and uneaſineſs in the doing of it. Though indeed, to ſpeak properly, I think theſe ought not any longer to be called *Doubts*, after they are thus *over-ruled* or *over ballanced*; but rather

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to go under the Name and Notion of pure *Scruples*, which the *Caſuiſts* of all Perſwaſions do not only allow, but adviſe that a man ſhould act againſt.

In plain Engliſh, That Doubtfulneſs about an Action which St. *Paul* ſpeaks of, and which he Cenſures as a ſin; was ſuch a *Doubtfulneſs*, as after the Action was done, rendred the man *Self-condemned*; his Conſcience could not but reproach him for doing as he did: But now in our Caſe, the Man is not at all *Self-condemned*, becauſe he hath the Teſtimony of his Conſcience that he hath acted according to the beſt of his Judgment and Diſcretion. Though he acts with a *Doubt*, yet he is ſatisfied he hath made the moſt *reaſonable* Choice that he could in his Circumſtances. And wherever a man doth ſo, he both acts in *Faith*, and without any danger of Condemnation from his own Conſcience.

So that after all the Buſtle that is made about *doing* or *forbearing* an Action with a *Doubting* Conſcience; you ſee there is no great intricacy in the Caſe, nor any neceſſity of *ſinning* on both hands, always ſuppoſing a man to be Sincere and Honeſt. For if he be really ſo, he will always do that which he judges moſt according to his Duty, or at leaſt, that which he judges to be conſiſtent with it; and wherever a man doth thus, it is certain he Acts with a ſafe Conſcience, notwithſtanding any *Doubt* he may have about the Action. Becauſe more than the former a man *cannot* do, and more than the latter he is not *bound* to do.

As for what ſins an *Erroneous Conſcience* may ingage a man in; or what troubleſome Reflections a *Melancholly Imagination* may occaſion to him in theſe Caſes; I am not to anſwer for them, they are of another Conſideration.

IV. Having thus largely treated of the *Nature* of a *Doubting Conſcience*, and of the *Rules* by which a man is to Act, whenever it happens; and that, both when he is left at his own *Liberty*, and when he is under the *Commands* of others: All that remains to be done, is to ſpeak ſomething about the *Authority* or *Obligation* of a *Doubting Conſcience*; which is our *Fourth* and laſt general Head.

But in truth the Diſcuſſion of this might very well be ſpared, after what I have ſaid relating to this Argument in ſeveral places of the foregoing Diſcourſe, particularly under my laſt Head. However I ſhall endeavour to give ſome Account of this Point; though

though I intend it a very ſhort one, becauſe, indeed what I have to offer is not ſo much any new matter, as an Application of the Principles I have before laid down to our preſent purpoſe.

The Point in queſtion is concerning the *Authority* of a *Doubting Conſcience* : Or, Whether a *Doubting Conſcience* doth bind at all, and how far?

In anſwer to this, I ſay in general; It is certain that a *Doubting* Conſcience of it ſelf lays no Obligation at all upon a man any way: Indeed it is a kind of Contradiction to ſuppoſe that it ſhould.

For, I pray, What is the Notion of a *Doubting Conſcience*, but this, That a man is uncertain or unreſolved in his mind, whether, as to this particular Action he be *bound* or not *bound*? To ſuppoſe now, that a man is obliged in Conſcience either way, by vertue of this *Doubt*; is plainly to ſuppoſe, that a man takes himſelf to be *bound*, while yet at the ſame time he is diſputing with himſelf whether he be *bound* or no.

To ſpeak this plainer if I can. Since Conſcience, as I have often ſaid, is nothing elſe but a mans *Judgment concerning Actions, whether they be Duties or Sins, or indifferent*: And ſince the Law of God *Commanding* or *Forbidding* Actions, or neither *Commanding* or *Forbidding* them; is the only Rule by which a man can judge what Actions are *Duties*, and what are *Sins*, and what are *Indifferent*: It plainly follows, that a man cannot be bound in Conſcience to *do* any Action, which it doth not appear to him, that Gods Law hath ſome way or other *Commanded*, and made a *Duty*; or to *Forbear* any Action which he is not convinced in his Judgment, that Gods Law hath ſome where or other *Forbidden*, and ſo made a *Sin*. And therefore, ſince in a Caſe where a Man is purely *Doubtful*, he cannot be ſuppoſed to have any ſuch Convictions that the Law of God doth either *Command* or *Forbid* the Action *Doubted* of (for if he had, he would no longer Doubt:) It follows likewiſe by undeniable Conſequence, that a Mans Conſcience is not *bound* on either ſide of the Action, but he may either *do* it or *forbear* it with a ſafe Conſcience.

So that if there be any Obligation at all upon a man to Act thus, rather than otherwiſe in a Doubtful Caſe; that Obligation muſt ariſe upon one of theſe two Accounts, *viz.* Either there is ſome *Law* of God concerning a *Doubting Conſcience*, which hath tied a man up to ſuch preciſe meaſures of Acting:

Or,

Or, at leaſt a man hath a *Perſwaſion* that there is ſome ſuch Law of God.

Now I grant, That in both theſe Caſes, there doth a direct Obligation paſs upon the mans Conſcience: But then it is to be remembred, that this Obligation doth not ariſe from the mans being *Doubtful* in his *Conſcience*; but from his being *reſolved* in his *Conſcience*. That is to ſay, if there be really any ſuch *Law* of God; it is the Obligation of a *Right Conſcience*. Or if there be not, but the man only judges that there is; it is then the Obligation of an *Erroneous Conſcience*: But as for the Obligation of a *Doubting Conſcience* there is no ſuch thing.

The great, therefore, or indeed the only Point that is to be inquired into, in order to the Reſolution of our preſent Queſtion, is this. Whether there be any Law of God which doth determine our Actions one way or other, in the Caſe of a *Doubt*; and what that Law is?

Now in anſwer to this Inquiry, I ſay, That it doth not appear that there is any expreſs Law of God in Holy Scripture, that hath laid any Obligation upon us as to this particular of a *Doubting Conſcience*, either one way or other.

The only Texts that I know of, which are thought to make for this purpoſe, are the two paſſages in the 14*th*. of the *Romans*, which I have before largely given an account of, *viz*. That in the 5*th*. Verſe, *Let every man be fully perſwaded in his own mind.* And that other in the laſt Verſe, *He that doubteth is damned if he eat, becauſe he eateth not of Faith.* But now I think I have made it plain, by ſeveral Arguments, that theſe Texts do not at all concern our preſent Caſe of a *Doubting Conſcience*, properly ſo called.

So that there being no expreſs *Particular* Law of God in Scripture, about acting with a *Doubting Conſcience*, we ſeem to be left as to that Affair, to the *General* Laws of God, as they are declared, whether by *Nature* or *Scripture*.

Now the moſt that any Man can be Obliged to by the *General* Laws of God, whether *Natural* or *Revealed*, in the Caſe of a Doubt, is only theſe two things. Firſt, to uſe his Endeavour to get himſelf as well inſtructed in his Duty as his Circumſtances and Opportunities will allow him. And Secondly, where he is at a loſs for Information in that Caſe, to Act as reaſonably as he can.

I do not ſay, that a Man in every Doubtful Caſe that happens, is ſtrictly *obliged* to thus much. But I ſay, it is impoſſible he ſhould be obliged to more. Becauſe indeed more than this he cannot do; and no man can be obliged to more than is in his Power.

Wherever therefore a Man in a *Doubtful* Caſe takes care to obſerve theſe two things, he Acts with a *ſafe* Conſcience, however he may act *Doubtingly* in that Caſe.

Thus far I think we are clear beyond Exception. But it may be, ſome will not be ſatisfied with this Account of our Point, but will be putting a farther Queſtion.

We have before laid down ſeveral *Rules* about a Mans Acting in a *Doubtful Caſe*, the ſum of all which comes to no more than what we have now ſaid, *viz. That in every doubtful Caſe a man is to act as reaſonably as he can.* The Queſtion now is, Whether a man is ſtrictly *bound* in Conſcience always to follow this Rule? Or, which is to the ſame effect, Whether a man in a matter concerning which he hath only a *pure Doubt*, may not without ſin indifferently chuſe either ſide of the Action, though yet perhaps one ſide doth appear to him more *reaſonable* or more *ſafe* than the other?

This Queſtion is indeed more *curious* than *uſeful*. But however, ſince it properly falls under the Argument we are now treating of, and tends ſomewhat to the clearing of it: I ſhall venture to ſay ſomething to it. Only I declare before-hand, that I mean not in what I ſhall ſay, to aſſert any thing *Dogmatically*, but only to propoſe, in order to further Examination: And withal, that whether that which we ſay be true or falſe; it doth not at all affect the Merits of the main Cauſe we have undertaken.

That now which I have to ſay to this Queſtion, is this. That though it be eternally *fit* and *natural*, and conducing to a mans *Happineſs* both in this World and the other, that he ſhould in all Caſes, and eſpecially in *Doubtful* Caſes, govern his Actions by the beſt Reaſon that he hath, (and certainly the *Wiſer* and the *Better* any man is, the more ſteadily will he purſue this Rule): Yet, on the other hand, I dare not ſay that a man is ſtrictly bound in Conſcience ſo to do; ſo as that he is properly guilty of ſin if he do not.

My Reaſon is this. Becauſe there is no Law of God which doth oblige us in all Caſes, to do that which is *Beſt*: And if we be not bound to do always that which is *Beſt*, we are not bound

to

to do always that which is moſt *Reaſonable*; for certainly, that which is *Beſt*, is always moſt *Reaſonable*: And if we be not bound to do that which is moſt *Reaſonable*, much leſs are we bound to do that which is *Safeſt*, becauſe that which is *Safeſt*, is not always either *Beſt* or moſt *Reaſonable*. And if there be no Law of God that doth oblige us to any of theſe things; then it is certain we do not *ſin* if we Act otherwiſe, For *where there is no Law, there is no Tranſgreſſion.*

Now, That the firſt of theſe Principles is true, we have as good Proof as can be deſired, *viz.* the Authority of St. *Paul*, who hath in the *7th.* of the *firſt* of the *Corinthians* thus determined: And if that be true, the other two muſt needs be ſo likewiſe, becauſe they follow from it by unavoidable Conſequence.

Taking now this for granted, I ask what Law doth a man Tranſgreſs, that in a purely Doubtful Caſe chuſeth either ſide indifferently, without reſpect to what is *Safeſt* or moſt *Reaſonable*? Always ſuppoſing that the ſide he chuſeth, be not in it ſelf *evil* and *forbidden* by God. I ſay, according to theſe Principles he tranſgreſſeth no Law at all, and conſequently cannot properly be ſaid to ſin at all.

If the man be at all guilty, it is upon one of theſe accounts, *viz.* either becauſe he Acteth againſt the *dictate* of his *Conſcience*, or becauſe he Acteth againſt the *Law* of God, in preferring that which is leſs *reaſonable* and *ſafe*, before that which is more ſo.

Now, Upon the former account he is not at all guilty, for his Conſcience hath paſſed no *Dictate*, no *Verdict* in this matter, and therefore he cannot be ſuppoſed to act againſt any ſuch *Dictate* or *Verdict*: The man is in ſuch a ſtate that he either believes he may act as he doth, without violation of his Duty: Or, at leaſt he hath no belief to the contrary; ſo that his *Conſcience* doth not any way *Condemn* him.

And as for the other thing, of his not chuſing that ſide of the Doubtful Caſe which appeared to him moſt *reaſonable*; it is true, if there was any Law of God which obliged him to make ſuch a Choice, he would be guilty of ſin if he choſe otherwiſe. But now it doth not appear, that there is any ſuch Law of God. Nay, ſo far from that, that it appears from St. *Paul* that there is no ſuch Law, but that every man is left to his own liberty in this matter; always ſuppoſing that he take care not to chuſe, or do any thing that he judgeth to be inconſiſtent with his Duty; which in our Caſe we do likewiſe ſuppoſe.

But then having ſaid this, we muſt add further. That though we here have concluded, that no man in a Doubtful Caſe properly ſo called, is ſtrictly obliged by any Law of God under the penalty of *ſin*, to chuſe one ſide more than another, but may indifferently chuſe either;

Yet in the *firſt* place, Whoever doth *believe*, or is *perſwaded* in his own Mind, either that he ought not at all to Act againſt a *Doubt*, or that in every Doubtful Caſe he is bound to follow the *ſafer* ſide, ſuch a man, ſo long as he ſo believes, cannot without ſin Act according to the Principles we have now laid down.

And Secondly, We are far from encouraging any man to act thus hand over head in a Doubtful Caſe; much leſs from commending him for ſo doing. For though we ſay, that, ſtrictly ſpeaking, a man doth not ſin which way ſoever he Act in a purely *doubtful* Caſe; yet on the other hand, I think he is but in a low Diſpenſation as to *Vertue* and *Goodneſs*, that never looks further into his Actions, nor takes more care about them, than only that they be not directly *ſinful*.

He that is heartily Good, will with St. *Paul* not only conſider what things are *Lawful*, but what things are *Expedient* and do *Edifie*.

It will not ordinarily be ſufficient to ingage ſuch a man in an Action, to ſatisfie him, that he may do that Action without tranſgreſſing any Law of God: But he will examine whether the *doing* or *forbearing* the Action doth more ſerve the ends of Vertue and Charity. And accordingly as that appears to him, ſo will he determine his Choice.

In a word, The Better and the more Vertuous any man is, the more delicate and tender ſenſe will he have, not only of that which the Law of God hath preciſely made his Duty, and ſo in a proper Sence doth *oblige* his Conſcience; but alſo of every thing that is *Reaſonable* and *Excellent*, and *Praiſe-worthy*: So that it will really grate upon his mind, to do many things, which, in ſtrict ſpeaking, cannot be accounted unlawful or forbidden.

And thus it is in our preſent Caſ: If we ſuppoſe a man to be a Devout Chriſtian, and a ſincere Lover of God, he will not be able to prevail with himſelf, in a Caſe where he *Doubteth*, to chuſe either ſide indiſcriminately (though if he ſhould, I do not know, as I ſaid before, what Law of God he tranſgreſſeth): but he will weigh and conſider the Reaſons on both ſides, and that

that which appears to him after ſuch Conſideration, to be moſt reaſonable, and conducing to Gods Glory, and his own and the Worlds good, that ſhall have the preference.

To come to a concluſion. The ſum of what I have now ſaid is this: As Conſcience is the immediate *Guide* of our Actions: So the *Rule* by which Conſcience it ſelf is to be guided, is the Law of God, and nothing elſe.

Though therefore we cannot be ſafe in following our Conſcience where our Conſcience is not guided by the Law of God, (becauſe, as I have often ſaid, our falſe Judgment of things doth not cancel our Obligation to act according to what the Laws of God require of us; unleſs we can juſtly plead unblameable Ignorance of thoſe Laws):

Yet, on the other hand, where-ever Conſcience tells us, that me muſt *do* this Action, becauſe the Law of God hath commanded it; we muſt *do* it, or we *ſin*.

And again, Where-ever Conſcience tells us that we muſt *avoid* this Action, becauſe the Law of God hath *forbidden* it, we muſt *forbear* that Action, or we *ſin*.

But if Conſcience cannot ſay that this Action is *commanded* or *forbidden*; there we are not tyed under the penalty of *ſinning*, either to *do* or to *forbear* that Action.

But yet if a Mans *Conſcience* ſhould thus ſuggeſt to him; Though I cannot ſay directly that this Action is a *Duty*, or that it is a *ſin*, becauſe I am at a loſs how the Law of God ſtands as to this matter, and conſequently, I cannot lay any direct Obligation upon you either way; yet my advice is, that you would chuſe this way, rather than the other: For this way, all things conſidered, appears moſt *fit* and *reaſonable* to be choſen, for there is more *Probability* that this is the right way than the other; or there is leſs *harm*, though you ſhould be miſtaken, in going this way than the other: Now in this Caſe, though a man be not properly obliged under the Guilt of *Sin* to obey his Conſcience, becauſe Conſcience doth not propoſe the Choice to him under that Condition; yet if he be a Wiſe and a Good man, he will undoubtedly chuſe that ſide which Conſcience, all things conſidered, hath repreſented to him to be the moſt *fit* and *reaſonable* to be choſen.

And thus much concerning our *Fourth* and laſt General Head.

Thus have I largely diſcuſſed the Caſe of a *Doubting Conſcience*

in general, and anſwered all the Conſiderable Enquiries that can be made about it. I am not ſenſible that I have left any material difficulty in this Argument untouched; though I am very ſenſible I have ſaid a great deal more than needed, in order to the Reſolution of that Caſe, for the ſake of which, I undertook this Diſcourſe. But I intended ſuch a diſcuſſion of this Argument, as would ſerve for all other Caſes as well as that.

I do not know whether it be needful to make a particular Application of what I have ſaid upon a Doubting Conſcience to the Caſe of our preſent Diſſenters. However, it will not be amiſs if I offer ſomething towards it; if it be but to ſave the Reader, who is concerned in that Caſe, the Labour and Trouble of doing it.

The Caſe which I am to ſpeak to is briefly this. There are ſeveral Perſons that are unſatisfied about the Lawfulneſs of our Communion, as it is eſtabliſhed and enjoined; and that, upon ſeveral Accounts. Some perhaps Doubt of the Lawfulneſs of all *Forms* of Prayer. Others about the Lawfulneſs of *our Form*. Others Doubt about the Lawfulneſs of our *Ceremonies*, or our way of Adminiſtring the *Sacrament*: And others it may be about other things. None of them can indeed ſay, that any of theſe things do go againſt their Conſcience; or that they believe the uſe of them to be unlawful: For that is the Caſe of a *Reſolved* Conſcience, with which we have nothing here to do: But they are *undetermined* and *uncertain* whether they be Lawful or no; and ſo long as they continue under this Suſpence of Judgment, they dare not join in our Worſhip; fearing they would ſin againſt God if they ſhould.

Now of thoſe that thus Doubt there may be two ſorts.

There are ſome perhaps that have only a *Single Doubt* in this matter. That is to ſay, They make a Doubt whether they may Lawfully *join* with us, ſo long as thoſe ſuſpected Conditions are required of them: But they make no Doubt, but are very well ſatisfied that they may Lawfully *Separate* from us.

Again there are others that Doubt on *both ſides*, as they have good Reaſon to do. That is, As they Doubt on one hand, whether the Terms of our Communion be not *ſinful*: So they Doubt on the other hand, whether it be not *ſinful* to Separate upon account of thoſe Terms.

Now of theſe likewiſe, there may be two ſorts.

Some perhaps are *equally* Doubtful whether the Terms of our Communion be lawful or no.

Others

Others Doubt *unequally*; that is, are more inclined to believe that they are *Sinful* than that they are *Lawful*.

That now which is to be enquired into, is; What is moſt Reaſonable and Adviſeable in Point of Conſcience to be done in each of theſe Caſes.

Now as to the firſt of theſe Caſes where a man hath only a Doubt on *one* ſide, and that is, Whether he may lawfully Communicate with us; but he hath no Doubt that he may lawfully Separate. To this I ſay *two* things:

Firſt, That the mans Doubting only on *one* ſide in this matter, doth not make it more ſafe for him to Separate, than if he had Doubted on *both* ſides. Becauſe indeed if he muſt Doubt at all, it is his Duty, he is bound to Doubt on *both* ſides; and he is guilty of groſs and criminal Ignorance of the Laws of God, if he do not. And if ſo, then his Doubting only on *one* ſide, doth not alter the Caſe, but it muſt have the ſame Reſolution as if it was a *Double Doubt* properly ſo called.

If it be ſaid that it is a conſtant Rule of a Doubting Conſcience, and we have allowed it as ſuch; that in Caſes where a man hath only a Doubt on one ſide of an Action, it is more ſafe to chuſe that ſide on which he hath no Doubt, than that other concerning which he Doubts: I do readily grant it. But then it is to be remembred, that that Rule is always intended, and doth only obtain in ſuch Caſes where a man may certainly without danger of ſinning *forbear* that Action of the Lawfulneſs of which he Doubts; though he cannot without danger of ſinning *do* the Action ſo long as he Doubts about it. But now in our Caſe here, it is evident to all men that are not wilfully blind, that as there may be a *danger* of *Sinning*, if a man ſhould conform with a Doubting Conſcience: So there is certainly a *danger* of *Sinning* (nay, and we ſay a much greater *danger*) if a man do not conform. So that that Rule hath here no place at all.

The truth is, Our Caſe, if it be rightly put, is this: A man is here ſuppoſed to reaſon thus with himſelf; 'I am very well ſa-'tisfied in my own mind, and I make no Doubt at all, that I 'may Lawfully and without *danger* of Sin, cut my ſelf off from 'the Communion of the Church [which yet by his Chriſtianity he is bound to maintain and preſerve as far as he can] 'and I 'may likewiſe lawfully and without danger of ſinning, live in a 'conſtant Diſobedience and Refractarineſs to all that Authority

'that

'that God hath ſet over me [to which yet by as plain Laws as any are in Nature, or the Goſpel, he is bound to be ſubject :] 'I ſay I am *ſatisfied* in my own mind, that I may lawfully do 'both theſe things : But I am very *unſatisfied* and *doubtful* whe-'ther in my preſent Circumſtances, it is not my *Duty* thus to 'do, ſo as that I ſhall *Sin* if I do not.

What now would any Prudent man ſay to this Caſe? Why? certainly he would ſay this; That he who can Doubt after this faſhion, is either a very *Ill* man, or a very *Ignorant* one. And that ſuch a man doth a great deal more ſtand in need of good *Advice*, and wholſome *Inſtructions* about the plain Duties of Chriſtianity, than of *Rules* and *Directions* how to behave himſelf in *Doubtful* Caſes. Becauſe indeed the beſt Rules of that kind are not to his Caſe, ſo long as he continues thus Ignorant. And if he ſhould obſerve them, yet that would not juſtifie his Acting, if it ſhould indeed prove contrary to the Law of God, becauſe it was both in his power; and it was his Duty to know better. A mans Right proceeding according to the *Rules* of a *Doubting Conſcience*, in a Caſe where he is entangled by a wilfully *Erroneous* one; will no more diſcharge him from *Sin* as to his *Soul*, if he do an evil Action, than the *Second* Concoction, though never ſo regular, can rectifie the Errors of the *Firſt* as to his *Body*.

But *Secondly*, Though that which I have now offered be the proper Anſwer to the Caſe before us: Yet there is this further to be ſaid to it, *viz.* Though we ſhould ſuppoſe that the Law of God had not obliged us to keep the Unity of the Church, or to obey our lawful Superiors; but had left it as an indifferent matter, and that there was no danger at all in *forbearing* theſe things; but the only danger was in *doing* them: So that the Doubt about Conformity, ſhould have perfectly the nature of a *Single Doubt* as it is put in the Caſe. I ſay, now even upon this Suppoſition it will bear a juſt Diſpute, whether *Conformity* or *Non-conformity* be the more eligible ſide; Nay, I ſay further, that if the Rule I laid down about a *Single Doubt* be true, it will appear, that as things now ſtand, it is more *reaſonable* for a man to *Obey* the Laws, and *Communicate* with the Church, ſo long as he hath only a bare *Doubt* about the Lawfulneſs of theſe things, than to *Diſobey* and *Separate*.

For thus I argue: Though in a *Single* Doubt the Rule be, That a man ſhould chuſe that ſide of an Action concerning which he

he hath *no Doubt*; rather than that concerning which he *Doubts*: Yet as was ſaid before, that Rule is always to be underſtood with this *Proviſo*, that all other Conſiderations in the Caſe be equal. If it ſhould happen that a very great *Good* may be compaſſed, or a very great *Evil* may be avoided, by Acting on the Doubtful ſide: That very Conſideration hath weight enough with a Wiſe man to turn the Balance on that ſide; and to make that which abſtractedly conſidered, was a *Doubtful* Caſe, to be *clear* and *plain* when it comes cloathed with ſuch Circumſtances. As I gave Inſtances in the Caſe of *Uſury* and *Law-Suits*. And twenty more might be added to them, if it were to any purpoſe.

If this now be admitted for Truth, we have a plain Reſolution of the Caſe before us, and that is this: There are ſo many great Advantages both to the Kingdom, and to a mans ſelf, to be obtained by Worſhipping God in the way of the Church; and likewiſe ſo many both *Publick* and *Private* Miſchiefs and Inconveniences that are conſequent upon Separation: That if in any Caſe theſe Conſiderations have weight enough to Over-balance a ſimple Doubt about the Lawfulneſs of an Action, they will certainly have ſufficient weight in this Caſe. And that man who is not ſwayed by them, doth not Act ſo reaſonably as he might do.

For my part, I ſhould think it very fooliſhly done of any man, that ſo long as he is utterly uncertain whether he be in the right or in the wrong (as every one that Doubteth is) ſhould be ſo confident of his Point; as to venture upon it no leſs a ſtake than the *Peace* of the *Kingdom* where he lives, and the *Security* of the *Religion* Eſtabliſhed; and withal his own *Eaſe* and *Liberty*, and laſtly, the *Fortunes* alſo of his Poſterity. And yet ſuch a wiſe Venture as this doth every one among us make, that upon the account of a bare *Doubt* about the Lawfulneſs of the things enjoined in our Communion, doth perſiſt in diſobedience to the Government, and Separation from the Church.

I wiſh this were well conſidered by our Doubting Diſſenters: They are wiſe enough as to the World in other matters; it is to be deſired that they would be as wiſe in this. And if they were, I dare ſay it would not at all prejudice their Wiſdom as to the other World. It will be but little either to their Comfort or their Reputation at the long run, to have it ſaid of them; that beſides the Diſturbance they have all along occaſioned to the Publick *Peace* and *Unity*, they have alſo brought their *Eſtates* and

Families

Families into danger of Ruine, by the juſt Proſecutions of Law they have drawn upon themſelves; and all this for the ſake of a Cauſe which they themſelves muſt confeſs, they are altogether uncertain and unreſolved about.

But this will appear much clearer, when we have ſet the *Doubt* about *Conformity* upon the right Foot, *viz.* Conſidered it as a *Double Doubt*, as indeed it is, in its own Nature: Which I come now to do.

In the *Second* place, There are other Diſſenters who (as they have good reaſon) do *Doubt* on *both* ſides of this Queſtion. As they Doubt on one hand, whether it be not a *ſin* to Conform to our Worſhip; becauſe there are ſeveral things in it which they ſuſpect to be unlawful: So on the other hand, they Doubt whether it be not their *Duty* to Conform to it; becauſe the Laws of the Church and of the Land, do require them ſo to do. And of theſe, as I ſaid, there are likewiſe *two* ſorts. Some perhaps are *equally* Doubtful whether the Terms of our Communion are Lawful or no; and conſequently muſt Doubt *equally* whether they be bound to Conform or no. Others Doubt *unequally*. That is to ſay, of the Two, it appears more *probable* to them, that our Communion is *Sinful*, than that it is a *Duty*.

Now as to the firſt of theſe Caſes. The Anſwer is very ſhort, and it is this. 'We have before proved by many Arguments, that 'in a Caſe of a *Pure* Doubt, about the Lawfulneſs of an Action 'where the *Probabilities* on both ſides are pretty *equal*: In that 'Caſe the Command of Authority doth always turn the Balance 'on its own ſide; ſo, as that it is not only reaſonable for the 'man to do that in Obedience to Authority, of the Lawfulneſs 'of which he Doubteth; but it is his Duty to do it; he ſins if 'he do not. For this I refer my Reader to the *Third* General Head of this Diſcourſe.

The only difficulty therefore is in the other Caſe, where the Doubt is *unequal*. And here the Caſe is this: As the man apprehends himſelf in danger of ſinning if he do not come to Church, and obey the Laws: So he apprehends himſelf in a *greater* danger of ſinning if he do: becauſe it doth appear more *probable* to him, that our Communion is *Sinful*, than that it is a *Duty*: And a greater Probability, *cæteris paribus*, is always to be choſen before a leſs.

But

But to this likewiſe we are ready provided of an Anſwer from the foregoing Diſcourſe, *viz.* 'That though it ſhould be ſuppoſed 'that in ſuch a Caſe as this, where the Ballance is ſo far inclined 'one way; the Authority of our Superiors alone will not have 'weight enough to caſt it on its own ſide: Yet in this particular 'Caſe of Church Communion, there are ſo many other Argu-'ments to be drawn from the Conſideration of the *greater Sin*, 'and the more *dreadful Conſequences*, of diſobeying the Laws than 'of obeying them; as will with any Impartial Conſcientious 'Man out-weigh all the *Probabilities* on the other ſide, ſo long as 'they are not ſo great as to create a *Perſwaſion*; and make it 'reaſonable for him rather to *Conform*, how ſtrong ſoever his '*Doubt* be about the Lawfulneſs of *Conformity* (ſo long as it is 'but a *Doubt*;) than to continue in *Separation*. *Vide* Third Pro-'poſition about a *Double Doubt*. pag. 27.

This is the Iſſue upon which we will try the Point before us, and I refuſe no indifferent Man, that will but have the Patience to hear what we have to ſay, to be *Umpire* between us and our Diſſenting Brethren, as to this Controverſie.

In the firſt place, let us ſuppoſe and admit, that the man who hath theſe Doubts and Suſpicions about the Lawfulneſs of our Eſtabliſhed Worſhip, doth really Doubt on the true ſide; and that he would indeed be a Tranſgreſſor of the Law of God, if he ſhould Conform to it. But then it muſt be admitted likewiſe, that That Law of God which forbids theſe things in diſpute, is wonderfully obſcurely declared.

There are no direct Prohibitions, either in the Law of *Nature* or the Book of *God* about thoſe things that are now Conteſted; ſo that the unlawfulneſs of them is only to be concluded from Conſequences.

And thoſe Conſequences likewiſe are ſo obſcure, that the Catholick Church from Chriſts time till our Reformation, was wholly ignorant of them. For though it doth appear, that either theſe, or the like Uſages, have always been in the Church: Yet it doth not appear, in all that compaſs of Time, either that any Particular Church ever condemned them as ſinful: Or indeed, that any Particular Chriſtian did ever Separate from the Church upon the Account of them.

And even at this Day, theſe Conſequences by which they are proved unlawful, are not diſcovered by our Governours either in *Church* or *State*. No, nor by as Learned and Religious *Divines*

of all Perſwaſions as any in the World.

The moſt Divines, by far the moſt; and thoſe as Pious and as Able as any, are clearly of Opinion, that there is nothing *Unlawful* in our Worſhip; but that, on the contrary, all things therein preſcribed are at leaſt Innocent, and free from ſin, if not Pure and Apoſtolical.

So that if it ſhould at laſt prove, that they are all miſtaken: Yet the Law of God, which forbids theſe things, being ſo very obſcure, and the Senſe of it ſo hardly to be found out; it is a great Preſumption that a man may very innocently and inculpably be Ignorant of it. And if ſo, it will be a very little, or no ſin at all in him to act againſt it. Becauſe if it was not his Duty to know this Law, it cannot be his Sin that his Practice is not according to it. And if it was his Duty to know it, yet it being ſo obſcurely delivered, and only to be gathered by ſuch remote Conſequences; it can at moſt be but a *Sin* of *Ignorance*, in an ordinary Perſon, where ſo many of the beſt Guides are miſtaken, if he ſhould tranſgreſs it.

And then farther, This muſt likewiſe be conſidered. That if Conformity to our Liturgy and Worſhip ſhould prove a ſin in any Inſtance: Yet the Evil Conſequences of it extend no farther than the Mans Perſon that is guilty of it. There is no damage ariſeth either to the Chriſtian Religion, or to the Publick Intereſt of the Kingdom, by any mans being a Conformiſt. But on the contrary, as things ſtand with us; *Unity* and *Conformity* to the Eſtabliſhed way, ſeem to bring a great advantage to both (as I hinted before) and to be a probable means to ſecure us from many Dangers, with which our Reformed Religion, and the Peace of the Kingdom is threatned.

Well, but now on the other hand. Let us ſuppoſe the contrary ſide of the Queſtion to be true, *viz.* That our Governours in this matter are in the *Right*, and we are in the *Wrong*. That there is nothing required of us in the Church of *England*, as a Term of Communion, but what is very Innocent and Lawful; however it be our misfortune to Doubt that there is, and in a zealous Indulgence to theſe Doubts, we take the liberty to live in open diſobedience to our Lawful Governours, and to break the Unity of the Church into which we were Baptized.

I ſay, admitting the thing to be thus; what kind of *Sin* ſhall we be guilty of then? Why certainly we are guilty of no leſs a Sin than cauſleſly *dividing* the *Body* of *Chriſt*, againſt which we are o ſeverely cautioned in the New Teſtament. We

We are guilty of the Breach of as plain Laws as any are in the Bible, *viz.* Of all thoſe that oblige us to *keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace:* that Command us to *Obey thoſe that are over us in the Lord*; *to be ſubject to the Higher Powers*; *to ſubmit to every Ordinance of man for the Lords ſake*; *to be ſubject not only for Wrath, but for Conſcience ſake.* I ſay, theſe plain Laws we *diſobey* for *Conſcience ſake*, and we diſobey them too in ſuch Inſtances, where we have the whole *Catholick* Church of old, and far the greateſt and the beſt part of the preſent Church, of a different Perſwaſion from us.

Well, but as if this was not enough What are the Conſequences of this our Sin? (For by the Conſequences of a ſin, the *greatneſs* of it is always to be eſtimated, I ſpeak as to the *Material* part of it, with which we are here concerned.) Why, they are moſt Terrible and Dreadful, both with reſpect to our ſelves and others.

By this unnatural Separation, we do, for any thing we know, put our ſelves out of the Communion of the Catholick Church; and conſequently out of the enjoyment of the ordinary means of Salvation.

We maintain and keep up Diviſions and Diſorders in the Church, and lend a helping hand to all thoſe Animoſities and Hatreds, all that bitter Contention and Strife, and Uncharitableneſs, which hath long torn the very Bowels of Chriſts Church, and given occaſion to that Deluge of Atheiſm, and Profaneneſs, and Impiety which hath over-ſpread the Face of it.

We put Affronts upon our Lawful Governours, who ſhould be in the place of God to us. We give Scandal to all our Brethren that make a Conſcience of living Peaceably and Piouſly. And laſtly, as we offer a very fair Handle and Pretence to all Diſcontented and Factious men to Practice againſt the Beſt of *Governments*: So we take the moſt effectual courſe to Ruine the Beſt Conſtituted *Church* in the World, and with it the Reformed Religion in this Kingdom.

This now being the Nature, and theſe being the Conſequences of our *Separation* from the Eſtabliſhed Church among us: I leave it to any indifferent man to Determine, whether any *Doubt* about the Lawfulneſs of our Communion, though that Doubt be backed with greater *Probabilities* than do appear on the other ſide; nay, if you will, with all the *Probabilities* that can conſiſt with the nature of a Doubt; can have weight enough to Ballance againſt ſuch a *Sin*, and ſuch Conſequences as Separati-

on in our Case doth involve a man in? I think there is no unconcerned Person but will pronounce, that supposing where there are Doubts on both sides, a man is to chuse that side on which there is the least *appearance* of *Sin*; he is in this Case certainly bound to chuse *Communion* with the Established Church, rather than *Separation* from it. And that is all I Contend for.

But now, after all this is said; it must be acknowledged, that if there be any man who hath other apprehensions of these matters, and that after a Consideration of all things that are to be said for or against Conformity, it doth appear to him upon the whole matter, both more *probable* that our Communion is sinful, than that it is a Duty; and withal, that to Communicate with us, will involve him in a *greater sin*, and in worse *Consequences*, than to continue in Separation: I say, if any man have so unfortunate an understanding as to make such an estimate of things; we must acknowledge, that according to all the Rules of a Doubting Conscience, such a man is rather to continue a Nonconformist, than to obey the Laws of the King and the Church. But then let him look to it; for his acting in this Case according to the best Rules of a Doubting Conscience, will not (as I said before) at all acquit him either of the Guilt or Consequences of Criminal Schism and Disobedience: Supposing that indeed he is all along under a mistake as (we say) he certainly is; and that there is nothing required in our Communion, that he might not honestly and lawfully comply with, as there certainly is not. Unless in the mean time, the man fell into these mistakes without any fault of his, and God Almighty; who is the Judge of all mens Hearts and Circumstances, doth know he had not means and opportunities to understand better.

FINIS.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

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